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No. 117

THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

A Comedy in Four Acts

BY

ST. JOHN HANKIN

AUTHOR OF "THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS," "THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL," "THE CASSILIS ENGAGEMENT," ETC.

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THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME.

Cast of Original Production at the Court Theatre, London, Oct. 23, 1906.

Persons in the Comedy.

LADY DENISON, 48.....	Miss Florence Haydon.
MARGERY, her daughter, 22.....	Miss May Martyn.
MRS. EVERSLEIGH, Lady Denison's sister-in-law, 45.....	Miss Margaret Murray.
MRS. HORROCKS, 55.....	Miss Lizzie Henderson.
MISS TRIGGS, 34.....	Miss Agnes Thomas.
GENERAL BONSOR, 67.....	Mr. Dennis Eadie.
MR. FIRKET, 52.....	Mr. Edmund Gwenn.
HUGH VERREKER, 29.....	Mr. Ben Webster.
BASIL HYLTON, 40.....	Mr. Berte Thomas.
SOAMES, Lady Denison's Butler, 38.....	Mr Eugene Mayeur.
WILLIAM, Lady Denison's Footman, 26.....	Mr. Norman Page.
ANSON, Lady Denison's Maid, 28.....	Miss Gertrude Henriques.

The action passes at Priors Ashton, Lady Denison's house in the country.

ACTS I., II. and III. in the Drawing Room.
ACT IV. in the Dining Room.

ACT I. Takes place in the afternoon.
ACT II. In the morning a week later.
ACT III. After luncheon on the same day.
ACT IV. After dinner a week later.

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Properties.

ACT I.

Two wicker work-baskets containing wool-work.
One brilliant blue woollen crochet strip about eight inches wide and six feet long (finished).
One ditto (Margery) all but finished.
One brilliant red strip (Lady Denison) half finished.
Hank of brilliant red wool (for Firket to wind).
Crochet needles, etc.
Green handkerchief case (tasteful), initials B. H. half worked.
Tea cups, spoons, etc., for nine.
Silver cream jug, milk jug, sugar basin.
Two silver teapots.
Silver salver.
Large silver tray.
Afternoon tea cloth.
Bread and butter, cake, hot tea-cake, knife.
Cake stand (three tiers) for handing these.
Cushion (Mrs. Horrocks).
Book (Mrs. Horrocks.)

ACT II.

German Grammar (Lady Denison).
Work-basket with needles, silks, etc.
Mauve handkerchief-case (tasteful), initials H. V.
Cigarette case (Verreker.)

ACT III.

Silver salver.
Three letters in envelopes that have come by post, one containing long letter for the General to read.
Fortnightly Review.
Book (Mrs. Eversleigh.)

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ACT IV.

White cloth for dinner table.
Dessert service, dessert knives and forks, wine-glasses, etc., for five.
Decanters. Fruit dishes, nuts, etc.
A dish of grapes.
Grape scissors.
Silver box containing cigars and cigarettes.
Matches.
Four silver candlesticks with shades.
Candles for these.

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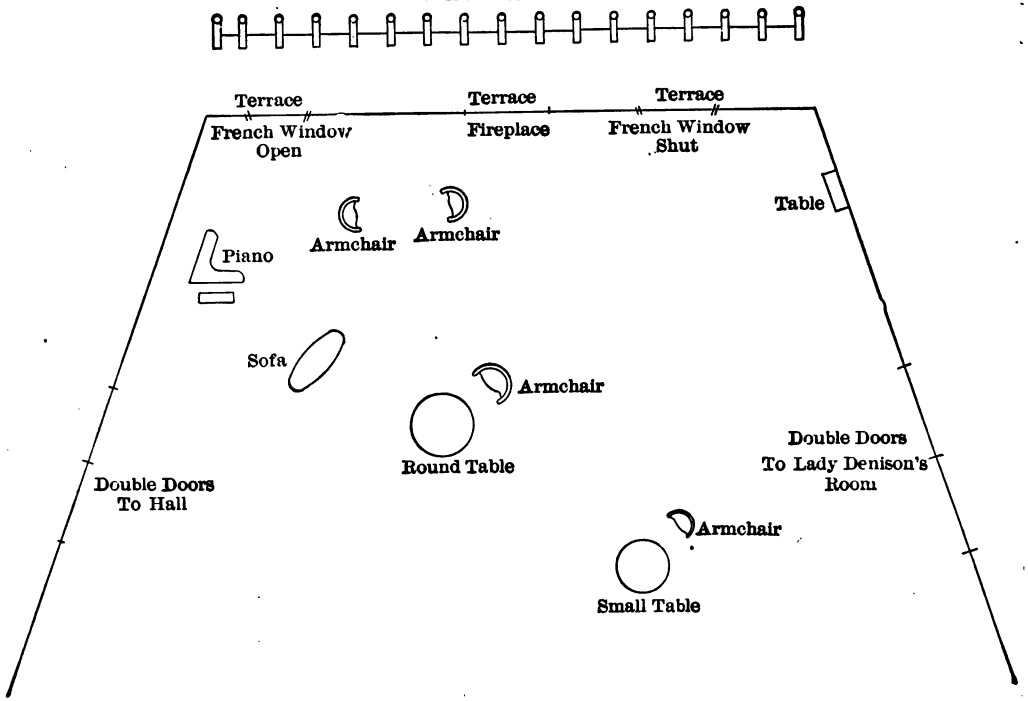
THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

ACT I.



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THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at Priors Ashton, a handsome room in the Adam style. Double doors* L. *lead to hall. Similar doors* R. *lead to* LADY DENISON'S *own sitting-room. French windows* L. C. *and* R. C. *on to terrace of which the low brick boundary wall ornamented at intervals by stone balls on squat brick piers is seen through open windows. Beyond view of garden and hills in distance. The fireplace is* C. *between French windows but there is no fire as the month is September. Writing table in corner* L. C. *Book on it. French window* L. C. *is open, that* R. C. *closed during this and the next act. There is a sofa up stage,* C. *between the windows sufficently far from the fireplace to leave room to pass behind it. Arm chair* R. C.,

NOTE. The Stage Directions throughout this play are given from the standpoint of the audience, R. meaning the Audience's Right, L. the Audience's Left.

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tea table near it. Small chair by table. Another table R. *with two wicker baskets on it containing crochet wool, etc. Two chairs* L. C. *Electric bell* R. *of fireplace. Electric light switch by door* L. *to light stage, another by door* R. *to light* LADY DENISON'S *room off.*

(*When the Curtain rises the stage is empty. Then enter* L. C. *from terrace through open French window* LADY DENISON, *a kindly comfortable lady of about forty-eight followed by her daughter* MARGERY, *a very pretty girl of twenty-two.*

LADY DENISON. I don't think I'll go out again, Margery. The sun is rather hot and it tires my eyes. *You* go if you like.

MARGERY. I'd rather stay with you, mother. The others will get on quite well without me for a little. Where will you sit?

LADY DENISON. Here I think. (*sits in armchair* R. C. *by table*) I do hope they're enjoying themselves. Do you think they are?

MARGERY. (*nods*) I think so.

LADY DENISON. That's right. I wonder where I put my work?

MARGERY. Here it is. Shall I bring it? (*brings two wicker baskets from table* R.)

LADY DENISON. Thank you, dear. I knew I'd left it somewhere. I wish this strip was finished. I'm getting so tired of it. (*gets out long strip of bright red woollen crochet*)

MARGERY. Poor mother! It'll soon be done now.

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(MARGERY *sits* L. C. *and gets out work.*)

LADY DENISON. (*beginning to crochet*) How are *yours* getting on?

MARGERY. (*who has also begun on bright blue strip*) Nearly finished. This is my last.

LADY DENISON. (*sighs*) I've still two more to do.

MARGERY. I'll do one of them for you, mother.

LADY DENISON. No, dear. I shall manage. But next time I shall give *blankets*.

MARGERY. But that wouldn't be the same as *making* something, would it?

LADY DENISON. That's why I should prefer it.

MARGERY. Lazy!

LADY DENISON. I'm so glad Mr. Hylton is coming down. He'll help us to entertain all these people.

MARGERY. Yes. Isn't it lucky he and Miss Triggs and Aunt Emily could all come by the same train! The carriage will only have to go to the station once.

LADY DENISON. I do hope Miss Triggs will *like* being here.

MARGERY. I think she will. Poor thing her lodgings looked dreadfully poor and uncomfortable when I went to see her. Here at least she'll have proper meals and feel she's among friends.

LADY DENISON. Where have you put her?

MARGERY. In the little room next mine. It's rather small but the house is so full just now. I wanted to put her next Aunt Emily. But Aunt Emily always insists on having that room for her maid.

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LADY DENISON. How long do you think she'll stay?

MARGERY. Two or three weeks I hope. Long enough to give her a thorough rest and change.

(*Enter* WILLIAM L.)

WILLIAM. Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON. Certainly. What is it, William? (*puts down crochet*)

WILLIAM. (*hesitating*) If you please, my lady. . . . I should like to give notice.

MARGERY. Give notice, William?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON. Why *now,* William?

WILLIAM. I'm very sorry, my lady, to have to give notice at all. . . . after being with your ladyship so many years. . . .

LADY DENISON. Yes, yes. But why give notice *now?* The proper time to give notice is surely ten o'clock in the morning when I am seeing the housekeeper?

WILLIAM. Very good, my lady. (*going*)

MARGERY. Stop, William. Why do you *want* to give notice? You've always been a good servant. Have you found another situation?

WILLIAM. No, miss. And I don't *want* to give notice. I hope you won't think that, Miss.

LADY DENISON. Then why do it, William?

WILLIAM. (*hesitating*) Well, my lady. It's on account of Soames. (*hesitates again*)

MARGERY. Soames?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. As long as Wilkins was here things were better. Not but what we had our

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quarrels in the servants' hall even then. On account of Thomas you remember, miss?

MARGERY. I remember.

WILLIAM. But with Soames it's different, miss. Soames and I. . . .

LADY DENISON. Have you spoken to the Housekeeper?

WILLIAM. Yes, my lady. But Mrs. Meredith says *she* can do nothing. Soames is that violent and his language quite awful when spoken to. So she said I had better come to you, my lady.

LADY DENISON. How very annoying of Mrs. Meredith.

MARGERY. Has Soames been using bad language to *you,* William?

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. Not that I mind *that.* But there's other things. . . . and in fact him and me don't hit it off. So perhaps I'd better leave at the month, my lady.

MARGERY. Nonsense, William. Why you've been with us ever since you were a boy.

WILLIAM. Yes, miss. And never thought to leave her ladyship so long as she was satisfied.

MARGERY. Very well. Mother is perfectly satisfied and you must stay. And you must try and be patient with Soames. He *has* rather a bad temper with other servants, I know, but I'm sure he tries to conquer it. And *you* must help him. will you?

WILLIAM. (*doubtfully*) Very well, miss.

MARGERY. That's right. And then you'll see things will go better. Things always go better if only one tries to *help* people, don't they?

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WILLIAM. Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON. And I'll speak to Soames to-morrow morning.

WILLIAM. Thank you, my lady. Thank you, miss. (*going*)

LADY DENISON. And will you please send Anson to me, William?

WILLIAM. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit* L.)

LADY DENISON. (*resuming crochet with a sigh*) How troublesome servants are! I did think after *Thomas* went we should have no more quarrelling. And now it's Soames.

MARGERY. Well of course we didn't engage *Thomas* because he was a *good* servant did we? And it's the same with Soames.

LADY DENISON. I suppose so. But it certainly makes helping people more difficult if they won't exercise a little self-control.

MARGERY. If they had more self-control they wouldn't *need* help, would they, mother dear?

LADY DENISON. I wonder if it would be a good thing to ask Mr. Hylton to speak to Soames?

MARGERY. Oh yes, I'm sure it would. Mr. Hylton has such a wonderful influence with people.

LADY DENISON. Very well. I'll ask him this evening if I remember.

(*Enter* ANSON L., *a smart maid dressed in black, pretty but looking rather ill and rather frightened.*)

ANSON. You sent for me, my lady?

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LADY DENISON. Yes, Anson. I want you to look at the mantle I wore this morning. The trimming has come unstitched.

ANSON. Is that all, my lady?

LADY DENISON. Yes. I meant to tell you about it before luncheon. I thought I would speak about it now while I remember.

ANSON. Very good, my lady. (*going*)

MARGERY. Is anything the matter, Anson? You don't look well.

ANSON. Nothing thank you, miss.

MARGERY. Would you like to see the doctor? We can easily send for him.

ANSON. (*alarmed*) Oh no, miss.

MARGERY. You're quite sure?

ANSON. *Quite,* thank you, miss. I'd *much* rather not have the doctor.

(*Exit* L.)

MARGERY. I'm afraid something must be the matter with Anson. She's looked wretched lately and she used to be so bright.

LADY DENISON. I daresay she's only bilious.

(*Enter* L C. *from terrace* MRS. HORROCKS *followed by* VERREKER. MRS. HORROCKS *is a thick-set, red-faced pompous woman of no breeding,* VERREKER *is a handsome rather devil-may-care young man of nine and twenty.*)

MARGERY. Are you coming in, Mr. Verreker.

VERREKER. Yes. It's cooler here than on the terrace.

LADY DENISON. Margery give Mrs. Horrocks a cushion.

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(MARGERY *makes* MRS. HORROCKS *comfortable on sofa* C.)

I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon?

MRS. HORROCKS. Quite, thank you.

VERREKER. (*sitting by* MARGERY) Mrs. Horrocks has had no end of a good time. She's been telling me the entire history of the Horrocks family from its remotest past. It appears the first of the Horrockses was a historian in the reign of Theodoric. His name was Orosius. Orosius-Horrocks, you perceive. Transliteration by Grimm's Law.

LADY DENISON. How very interesting.

VERREKER. It was.

MARGERY. Have you left General Bonsor in the garden?

VERREKER. No. He's just coming. He wants his tea. *He's* enjoyed himself too by-the-way. He's been telling Mr. Firket a story about India for the last two hours—Poor Firket! and it's going on still.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*heard off* C.) So I said to Fennesey—Fennesey was our senior major. . . .

(*Enter* GENERAL BONSOR *and* FIRKET L. C. *in middle of this speech.* GENERAL BONSOR *is a bulky white-whiskered red-faced old gentleman.* FIRKET *a pale anæmic little man in spectacles.*)

Thorough sportsman he was! Shoot a tiger as soon as look at him. Got killed afterwards out in the Sunderbunds. Tiger ate him. Very sad. However—I said to Fennesey—"Fennesey, my

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boy, if you don't keep that dash'd Khansamah of yours in order," I said, "you'll poison the whole cantonment." Fennesey laughed at that like anything. You should have seen how he did laugh!

(GENERAL BONSOR *laughs immoderately.*)

(MRS. HORROCKS *rises impatiently, gets book from table in corner* L. C., *returns to sofa and pretends to be immersed in it.*)

So when the judge and I and Travers were dining with him a week or two later (*turning sharply on* FIRKET, *whose attention is clearly wandering*) I told you about Travers, didn't I?

MR. FIRKET. (*pulling himself together with an effort*) Eh? No, I think not.

GENERAL BONSOR. Ah, I must. Or you won't understand the story. Travers was in the Guides. He married—let me see whom *did* he marry? I shall remember in a moment. (*pauses, cudgelling his brain*)

LADY DENISON. Won't you sit down Mr. Firket? You look quite tired.

MR. FIRKET. (*faintly*) Thank you. (*sinks on to sofa* L. C.)

GENERAL BONSOR. Blake. . . . Blake. . . . Blakesley. *That* was the name! She was a daughter of old Tom Blakesley of the Police. But I never knew him. He was on the Bombay side. Travers died afterwards of enteric at Bundlekhund, I think, or was it Chittagong? Yes it was Chittagong, I remember, because I had a touch of fever there myself a year or two later. Well to go back to Fennesey. . . .

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MARGERY. (*coming to the rescue*) Can you spare Mr. Firket to me for a little, General? I want him to wind some wool for mother.

GENERAL BONSOR. Eh? Oh certainly, certainly. (*goes up stage annoyed*)

(MR. FIRKET *rises with alacrity.*)

MARGERY. Do you mind, Mr. Firket? You did the last for her so well.

MR. FIRKET. Not at all, Miss Denison. On the contrary.

VERREKER. (*to* MARGARET *sotto voce*) I call that real tact!

(MR. FIRKET *is set to wind red wool.*)

MARGARET. Hush!

MRS. HORROCKS. (*to* LADY DENISON) What a lot of work you do Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON. Yes, this is a crochet counterpane for old Mrs. Buckley. It's very ugly, isn't it? (*holds it up disparagingly*) Margery and I each have to do eight strips. Then we fasten them together, like this. (*puts red and blue strip side by side*) Mrs. Buckley's eighty-three next week and almost blind. That's why Margery chose such bright colours. So that she might be able to *see* them you know. Aren't they *detestable?*

MARGERY. There's my last finished. (*holds up strip in triumph*) *Sure* you wouldn't like me to do one of yours, mother?

LADY DENISON. No, thanks, dear. If I stopped doing this I should only have to begin on Mrs. Jackson's stocking. I'll do my share.

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MARGERY. All right. Then I can get on with something else. (*gets handkerchief case out of basket*)

VERREKER. I say you're not going to begin another thing straight off?

MARGERY. Not begin. This is half done. It's a handkerchief case.

VERREKER. Is it for yourself?

MARGERY. No. It's for Mr. Hylton.

VERREKER. The man who's coming down this afternoon?

MARGERY. Yes. Those are his initials. (*shows them*)

VERREKER. B. H?

MARGERY. Yes, his name's Basil. It's a pretty name isn't it? (*goes on working*)

VERREKER. Why are you working him a handkerchief case?

MARGERY. I thought he'd like one.

VERREKER. Well I'd like a handkerchief case. Why don't you work one for me?

MARGERY. Perhaps you don't deserve one.

VERREKER. I don't. But you said this morning when one did things for people one oughtn't to think of what they deserve but what they want.

MARGERY. And you said "What rot."

VERREKER. Well I've changed my mind. I think you're quite right. And I *want* a handkerchief case. *My* initials are H. V.

MARGERY. Isn't that rather a sudden conversion?

VERREKER. It's none the worse for that. Besides now I come to think of it I do deserve one.

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I played billiards with old Firket this morning. To please *you.*

MARGERY. (*working steadily*) To please *him.*

VERREKER. It didn't. I made a hundred while he made eight. He simply hated it. Old Firket's a perfect ass at billiards—though he says he can get me thirty per cent off any kind of billiard table that's made.

MARGERY. Still it was nice of you to play with him.

VERREKER. It was. I sha'n't do it again. And I think I ought to have a handkerchief case for doing it at all.

MARGERY. Very well. You shall have the next.

VERREKER. Not the next. This one.

MARGERY. No, no. This is Mr. Hylton's. It's the first time he's been to stay with us. He works very hard while he's in London and scarcely ever gives himself a holiday so I promised if he'd come and spend a fortnight with us this summer I'd work him something. This is it.

(*The* GENERAL, *after mooning restlessly about up stage, has seated himself on sofa by* MRS. HORROCKS, *who makes room for him on her right with obvious unwillingness. She goes on reading her book ostentatiously.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*looking at watch testily*) I thought you had tea at *five,* Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. So we do, General. Is it five yet?

GENERAL BONSOR. Twelve minutes past. Twelve and a half.

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LADY DENISON. I'm so sorry. I suppose they're waiting for the others. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh comes to-day. And Mr. Hylton and Miss Triggs. You've met my sister-in-law I think?

GENERAL BONSOR. Yes. Met her in Madrid when Eversleigh was at the Embassy there. I was at Gibraltar.

LADY DENISON. He's at Vienna now. I wish he wasn't. It's such a long way off. We see simply nothing of them.

GENERAL BONSOR. Not in London this Season?

LADY DENISON. No. And my brother can't get away even now. So Emily is coming by herself. I do hope she's not going to be late.

GENERAL BONSOR. She *is* late. But everybody's late now-a-days. It's the fashion. And a doosid bad fashion too. When I was at Alleghur in '76—

LADY DENISON. I don't think it's her fault. Perhaps the train. . . .

GENERAL DENISON. Just so! Her train's late of course. *That's* the English Railway System all over. The trains run anyhow, simply anyhow. Why when *I* was at Alleghur. . . .

LADY DENISON. It may not be the train General. Perhaps one of the horses. . . . However I really don't think we'll wait any longer. Will you ring, Mr. Verreker?

(VERREKER *does so.*)

MR. FIRKET. You ought to have a motor, Lady Denison. Much more reliable than horses. I can

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get you twenty per cent off any pattern you like to choose if you think of it.

LADY DENISON. Thank you very much, Mr. Firket. But I'm old-fashioned. I think I shall stick to horses.

MR. FIRKET. Well, if you should change your mind just apply to me. That's all.

LADY DENISON. I won't forget——

(*Enter* SOAMES L.)

Bring tea, Soames. We won't wait for Mrs. Eversleigh.

SOAMES. Very good, my lady.

(*Exit* L.)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*clears his throat*) As I was saying, when I was at Alleghur. . . .

MR. FIRKET. I might make it five and twenty per cent with some makers. . . .

GENERAL BONSOR. (*sternly*) As I was saying . . . *as* I was saying . . . (*a hush falls*) When I was at Alleghur in '76 . . . (*annoyed*) There now! I've forgotten what I *was* going to say!

(MRS. HORROCKS *closes her book angrily with a snap. The* GENERAL *starts and glares at her.*)

But it'll come back to me. Ever at Alleghur, Verreker, when you were in India?

(VERREKER *standing at window* R. C. *looking out, back to audience.*)

VERREKER. For a few months.

MRS. HORROCKS. What was your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

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VERREKER. Beastly place I thought it.

MRS. HORROCKS. What *was* your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Horrocks. The Munsters.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*delighted*) Then you knew Toby Nicholson! He commands the Munsters, doesn't he?

VERREKER. Yes.

GENERAL BONSOR. Why *I* know Toby. First-rate chap! Knew him when he was a subaltern. I must write to the old beggar. Where are the Munsters now?

VERREKER. Shorncliffe, I believe.

(*From this point onwards the sun begins to set and the red glow gets gradually brighter till* MARGERY *remarks on it a few minutes later.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. Good! I'll write to-night by Jove. I'd like to hear from Toby again. I've not seen him since we were at Poonah together. *That* reminds me what I was going to tell you! When I was at Alleghur in '76 we had a train from Goomti that was timed to arrive at Alleghur at 6:38. Just in time to change before dinner don't you know. Well that train was *always* late, *always* by Jove! So I said to Macpherson . . . he was superintendent of the Alleghur-Goomti line. Good chap Mac. Very good judge of a horse. Died of cholera I remember in '81—or was it '82? Anyhow I said to him "Mac, my boy, I'll race your dashed little train from the Boondi Bridge to the station—that's the last

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three miles into Alleghur—with my pony and trap for a hundred rupees.

(*During this speech* SOAMES *and* WILLIAM *have brought in tea. A certain hostility is just visible between them but very discreetly shown. They put the tea on the table by* LADY DENISON *and go out* L. MARGERY *goes to table and pours out.*)

MARGERY. Does everyone take cream?

MRS. HORROCKS. Milk for me, please. And *one* lump of sugar.

VERREKER. *Two* lumps for me.

GENERAL BONSOR. Well old Mac wasn't at all pleased at that. He was awfully proud of his little one horse line. It was opened in '72 I remember. Pat Ellis was traffic manager. Ellis had been. . . .

MARGERY. Will you give that to Mrs. Horrocks, Mr. Verreker, and this to mother.

GENERAL BONSOR. Ellis had been. . . .

LADY DENISON. You'll find some tea cake under that cover, Mrs. Horrocks.

GENERAL BONSOR. *As* I was saying. . . .

MRS. HORROCKS. Thank you.

GENERAL BONSOR. As I was saying . . . (*glares, silence falls*) Ellis had been on the Bengal-Nagpore line before he came to Goomti. He was a son of old General Ellis who was killed in the first Sikh war. He married. . . .

VERREKER. Your tea, General.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*irritably*) In a moment. In a moment—he married Nellie Tremayne,

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daughter of Tremayne of the 63rd. Tremayne had four daughters I remember. . . .

LADY DENISON. (*loud whisper*) Will you cut that cake, Mr. Verreker, and see if anybody would like some?

(VERREKER *does so with elaborate precautions as to silence.* GENERAL BONSOR *meantime going on with his story uninterruptedly in authoritative voice.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. Kitty the eldest married Molyneux, who was afterward commissioner at Ranigunj. One of his sons was gazetted the other day to the Shropshires. Another went into the navy. Maud, the second girl, married Monty Robertson. He was a gunner. They lived in a little house outside Alleghur just where the road forks. One way leads to Balaghai, the other leads to . . . tut, tut, what's the name of that place the Alleghur road goes to, Verreker?

VERREKER. (*who is handing tea cake*) I don't know. Alleghur I suppose.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*annoyed*) No! no! Kupri! that's the name. Kupri. There was one more daughter but I don't remember what became of her. No there were only three of them I recollect. It was *Ainslie* who had four daughters, the four Graces we used to call them—because there were four of them.

LADY DENISON. (*still whispering*) Some more tea, Mr. Firket?

(MR. FIRKET *murmurs "No" with infinite precaution and puts down cup.*)

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GENERAL BONSOR. Ainslie was Superintendent of Police and afterwards went to Central India. But I was going to tell you about that race. Well I took the trap. . . .

(*Enter* SOAMES L.)

SOAMES. Mrs. Eversleigh, Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton.

(*Enter* L. MRS. EVERSLEIGH, MISS TRIGGS *and* MR. HYLTON.)

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *is a prosperous well-dressed rather hard looking woman of forty-five,* MISS TRIGGS *a lean angular lady of thirty-four with thin lips tightly compressed, clothed in meagre tight-fitting black garments.* HYLTON *is a handsome man of forty. A good face but not in the least ascetic or solemn. Clothes quite human and unclerical.*)

LADY DENISON. (*rising*) Dear Emily, how are you. (*kisses her*) The General's story was so interesting I never heard the carriage. You know General Bonsor don't you?

(GENERAL BONSOR *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH *shake hands.*)

How do you do, Miss Triggs. How do you do, Mr. Hylton. (*shakes hands with her and* HYLTON)

MARGERY. How do you do, Aunt Emily (*kiss*) I hope you've not had a tiring journey Miss Triggs. (*hand shake to her and* HYLTON)

LADY DENISON. I must introduce you all. Mrs. Horrocks this is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh. (*bow*) Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton.

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General Bonsor, Mr. Firket, Mr. Verreker. (*confused bowing from everybody*)

MARGERY. And now you'll all have some tea. You must be dying for it. Do you know you're dreadfully late?

GENERAL BONSOR. I was just saying before you came in, Mrs. Eversleigh, the English railways are the most unpunctual in the world.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*frigidly*) Indeed? I believe our train was *before* its time. But one of the horses got a stone in its shoe or something and Hollings took about half an hour getting it out.

MR. FIRKET. What did I tell you, Lady Denison. You'd much better have a motor.

MARGERY. Your tea, Aunt Emily. (*takes it to her*) Cream and sugar, Miss Triggs?

MISS TRIGGS. No tea for me, thank you. I never drink tea unless it is *quite* fresh made.

MARGERY. Then I'll order some fresh for you. Mr. Verreker will you ring?

MISS TRIGGS. (*acidly*) Pray don't trouble. I can do *quite* well without any tea.

MARGERY. It's no trouble.

(VERREKER *rings.*)

Bread and butter, Aunt Emily. (*hands to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH)

LADY DENISON. You look dreadfully overworked as usual, Mr. Hylton. You must have a complete rest while you're down here. (*to* MISS TRIGGS) Mr. Hylton works a great deal among the poor in London.

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MISS TRIGGS. Indeed. (*to* HYLTON) Do you find that does any good?

HYLTON. (*smiling*) I hope so. . . .

MISS TRIGGS. What *kind* of work do you do?

HYLTON. Oh preaching and writing and so on.

MISS TRIGGS. Preaching? Are you a clergyman?

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton is the Founder of the Church of Humanity.

MISS TRIGGS. Oh. Not a *real* clergyman.

(*Enter* SOAMES L. *with teapot on salver.*)

MARGERY. Some fresh tea, Soames.

SOAMES. Yes, miss. (*puts new pot in place of old which he removes*)

(*Exit* L.)

MARGERY. *Now* you can have your tea, Miss Triggs. (*gives cup to her and takes* MRS. EVERSLEIGH'S)

MRS. HORROCKS. Where *is* the Church of Humanity, Mr. Hylton? I don't think I've ever been in it.

HYLTON. (*quite simply*) The Church of Humanity is everywhere.

MRS. HORROCKS. But the *Church,* the building?

HYLTON. We have no building so far. I preach in halls and different places about London which we hire.

MISS TRIGGS. I don't call that being *everywhere.* I call that being *nowhere.*

HYLTON. (*smiling*) In one sense of course.

MARGERY. Give that to Aunt Emily, Mr. Verreker.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*to* VERREKER, *who brings her back her cup*) Are you one of the Norfolk Verrekers? I met Sir Montague in London two seasons ago.

VERREKER. He's my uncle.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I remember he was very full of some experiments he was making . . . with turnips. To combat agricultural depression I think.

VERREKER. I daresay. Uncle Montague's always muddling round with that kind of thing.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It doesn't interest you apparently?

VERREKER. Not in the least. But it amuses him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is he working at it still?

VERREKER. Probably. I've not seen him for the last four years.

MARGERY. (*noticing red glow of sunset through window* C.) *What* a lovely sunset! Come all of you. (*goes to window* L. C.) We *must* go out and see it. Mrs. Horrocks, General, Aunt Emily. Come.

LADY DENISON. Margery! Emily hasn't finished her tea yet. Nor has Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS. Thank you. I have quite done. (rises)

MARGERY. (*outside* L. C.) Come to the end of the terrace. You can't see it properly from here. Be quick or it'll be gone. Come along.

(*All troop off* L. C. *save* LADY DENISON *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *They are seen to pass window* R. C. *before they disappear.*)

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LADY DENISON. How did you leave Edward, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Very well I think. He's had a lot of work to do lately, and that always seems to suit him. How have *you* been?

LADY DENISON. Quite well, thanks.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Who are all these dreadful people you've got down here?

LADY DENISON. Not dreadful, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Aren't they? I can hardly imagine a more dreadful visitor than General Bonsor. He's the greatest bore in London. Edward says he's nearly emptied three of the Service Clubs. I thought people had given up inviting him.

LADY DENISON. That's why we asked him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*puzzled*) I beg your pardon?

LADY DENISON. That's why we asked him. You see he's getting an old man and it seemed so unkind that nobody would have him to their houses. Of course his stories *are* rather long but I suppose he can't make them any shorter. So Margery thought if we asked him down for ten days he might enjoy it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I think it very unlikely *we* shall enjoy it. (*rises and puts down cup*)

LADY DENISON. Would you mind ringing while you're up, Emily. Then Soames can take away.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*does so*) Who's that Miss Triggs?

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LADY DENISON. She's a governess. She teaches German.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is she going to teach you?

LADY DENISON. (*emphatically*) Oh *no*, Emily. Margery did suggest it. But I refused. Miss Triggs is only here as a visitor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I see.

LADY DENISON. Margery met her at the Hammonds. She taught Cecily for a few weeks—till they could get some one else. She's very poor I'm afraid and doesn't get many pupils. So Margery thought it would be kind to ask her to stay.

(*Enter* SOAMES.)

You can take away, Soames. And turn on the lights.

SOAMES. Yes, my lady. (*turns on electric lights and removes tea things*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Are all your visitors invited on this penitential system?

LADY DENISON. Except you, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Except me of course. That Mr. Firker for instance?

LADY DENISON. Firk*et*. He's something in the City. I'm not sure what. But nothing very prosperous I'm afraid. He used to be a stockbroker but he failed. And now he sells things on commission. I believe that's what it's called. He's always wanting to sell me a new billiard table or a bicycle or a sewing machine. To-day it was a motor car. I shall have to buy something from him before he leaves, I know.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Where do you pick up these extraordinary people?

LADY DENISON. Margery found Mr. Firket. On the Underground Railway.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Where?*

LADY DENISON. At South Kensington I think, But it may have been Sloane Square. It was in a first class carriage and Mr. Firket only had a third class ticket. An inspector came round and wanted to take him up. So Margery paid his fare and then of course they became friends.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Naturally!

LADY DENISON. He's been with us nearly a week. He goes on Monday.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm glad to hear it.

LADY DENISON. Mrs. Horrocks we met in a hotel at Mentone. The other people at the hotel would hardly speak to her. They were quite rude about it. Which seemed very unkind as she is only dull and rather vulgar. And she can't *help* that can she? So Margery said we must be *nice* to her, and later on when we were arranging whom to have down we thought *she* should be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Surely this is rather a new departure of yours, Muriel? You were always perfectly ridiculous about what you call being kind to people. But it never used to be as bad as this.

LADY DENISON. It's Mr. Hylton's idea. He calls it beginning one's charity at home. He wants everyone to do it.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. How curious. He *looks* sane enough.

LADY DENISON. Of course he's sane Emily. Mr. Hylton is a very clever man. He writes *books*. I know they must be very clever because I can so seldom understand them. But Margery does.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. But why does Mr. Hylton think you should fill your house with wild beasts in this way? Is it for the good of *their* souls, or of yours?

LADY DENISON. Both, I think. It was in a sermon he preached—on the true hospitality and the false. It was a beautiful sermon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Which is this?

LADY DENISON. The true, of course. False hospitality is inviting people because you like them. True hospitality is inviting them because they'd like to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Ah! I wish you'd thought of mentioning in your letter that you were practising true hospitality just now. Then I wouldn't have come.

LADY DENISON. Now you're being worldly, Emily. And when people are worldly it always makes me drop my stitches.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why was Mr. Verreker invited, by the way? I suppose there's something shady about him as *he's* here?

LADY DENISON. I don't think so. Margery met him at a dance at the Fitz Allen's. His parents are both dead and he's quarrelled with his uncle and altogether seems rather alone in the

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world. So Margery thought he was *quite* a person to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why did he quarrel with his uncle?

LADY DENISON. About his leaving the army, I think.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why did he leave the army?

LADY DENISON. I don't know, Emily, I never asked.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *shrugs impatiently.*)

That's all we've got at present.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And quite enough too. I hope they're all properly grateful.

LADY DENISON. They don't *know.* Of course we shouldn't *dream* of telling them. It would spoil all their pleasure. They think they're asked here because we *like* them. If they didn't they wouldn't enjoy it half so much. People do so love to feel they're *wanted.*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It must be an unusual sensation with the General! (*pause*) How long has Mr. Hylton been preaching in this absurd way?

LADY DENISON. He has been working among the poor for years I believe. But it was only this season that people one knew began to go to him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Does he make converts?

LADY DENISON. I suppose so. His services were crowded.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Indeed? I must remember to take Edward when we are next in London. Edward always enjoys a new religion.

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LADY DENISON. Won't you talk to Mr. Hylton while he's down here?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I shall make a point of doing so. London is changing very much, Muriel. Twenty years ago every one in society went to Church—or at least pretended to do so. Now-a-days people seem to go anywhere!

(*Enter* MARGERY L. C. *followed by* MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS. *The sunset glow has faded from the sky.*)

MARGERY. It's been *such* a lovely sunset Aunt Emily. You *were* lazy not to come out.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Your mother and I have been talking.

MARGERY. Can Mrs. Horrocks write a letter in your room, Mother? The General's in the library with Mr. Firket and that's rather disturbing.

LADY DENISON. Certainly. Will you turn on the lights, Margery? You'll find note paper and things on my table Mrs. Horrocks.

(MARGERY *turns on switch by door* R. *and opens it.*)

MRS. HORROCKS. Thank you so much, Lady Denison.

(*Exit* R.)

MARGERY. (*to* MISS TRIGGS) *Now* I can show you your room, Miss Triggs, if you will come upstairs.

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LADY DENISON. I'm afraid we have had to give you a *very* small room, Miss Triggs. But the house is so full just now.

MISS TRIGGS. (*acidly*) *Pray* don't apologise, Lady Denison. Of course I know persons who are compelled to support themselves by *teaching* can not expect to be treated with *ceremony! Anything* will do for *me*. . . . .

LADY DENISON. I assure you. . . . .

MISS TRIGGS. Not at all. I *quite* understand.

LADY DENISON. But really, Miss Triggs. . . . .

MISS TRIGGS. *Please* do not trouble to say any more. It is quite unnecessary. Shall we go, Miss Denison? (*stalks out* L. *followed by* MARGERY.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What an intolerable woman!

LADY DENISON. I do think she might have let me explain.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Explain! I should have packed her out of the house if I'd been in your place.

LADY DENISON. I don't think Mr. Hylton would approve of *that?*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then Mr. Hylton should do his own entertaining. Why doesn't he have Miss Triggs to stay with *him?*

LADY DENISON. Emily! Mr. Hylton is a bachelor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. So I suppose. People with absurd theories about life usually *are* bachelors. But I don't think Miss Triggs would have come to any harm. She's excessively plain.

LADY DENISON. Really Emily, what dreadful

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things you say. I don't think living in Vienna can be at all good for you.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What I can't understand is why, if you *must* be kind to people—which seems to me quite unnecessary—you shouldn't choose agreeable people instead of disagreeable ones.

LADY DENISON. (*worried*) I'm afraid I can't make it any clearer. But Mr. Hylton will tell you.

(HYLTON *passes window* R. C.)

Here he is.

(*Enter* HYLTON L. C.)

Mr. Hylton will you kindly explain to Mrs. Eversleigh why I have to be kind to disagreeable people. I never can remember and Margery isn't here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*with dangerous sweetness*) My sister-in-law has been telling me about your peculiar doctrines, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON. You see, Mrs. Eversleigh, agreeable people don't need friends to be kind to them. They have plenty already. Disagreeable people have not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*briskly*) If people are disagreeable they don't deserve kindness.

HYLTON. It's not what people *deserve* but what they *want* that matters, don't you think? In fact often the less people deserve the more we ought to help them. They need it more.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm afraid that's hardly a

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view you can expect me to take seriously, Mr. Hylton. It's very *modern* and original but it's not *serious.*

HYLTON. (*smiling*) I should hardly have called it *modern.* Usen't we to be taught that it was our duty to love our enemies?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. But only on Sundays. And no one ever *dream'd* of doing it. So of course that didn't matter. You want Lady Denison to *do* it.

HYLTON. I certainly think the world would be a happier place and a better place if people helped each other because they needed help irrespective of whether they deserved it or not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. That is certainly a convenient doctrine for your friend Miss Triggs.

HYLTON. (*smiling*) What has my friend Miss Triggs been about? I never met her till this afternoon by the way.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Still it's on *your* principles that she was invited. And her manners are insufferable.

HYLTON. A little brusque perhaps. But I daresay it's only shyness. She has never been here before, has she, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. No.

HYLTON. And lots of people are shy in a strange house, aren't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Her shyness certainly takes a singularly unpleasant form.

HYLTON. Well we must just set to work to be kind to her and make her enjoy her visit and in a week or two she'll be a different woman. It's

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wonderful how a little kindness and good-will softens people. Will you try?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*laughing*) No, no, Mr. Hylton, *I'm* not going to join the Church of Humanity, not even to change Miss Triggs. Though I'm sure *any* change would be for the better.

HYLTON. (*quite good-tempered*) We shall convert you yet, you'll see.

(*Enter* MARGERY L.)

LADY DENISON. Is Miss Triggs better satisfied with her room now, Margery?

MARGERY. Yes, I think so. I've put her into mine.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What!

MARGERY. That's why I've been so long. I had to empty some of the drawers for her and move the bed.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really Margery!

MARGERY. What is it, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. To turn out of your own bedroom merely to please an ill-tempered German Governess. I've never heard of such a thing.

MARGERY. Poor Miss Triggs. I suppose she *has* rather a curious temper. But I daresay she can't help it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Nonsense: She's a thoroughly ill-conditioned person.

MARGERY. (*mildly*) Well Aunt Emily there's no use being *angry* with her about it, is there? We must just be nice to her and try and make her stay pleasant and then I daresay she'll be better.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. So Mr. Hylton was good enough to suggest.

MARGERY. Then it's sure to be right. Mr. Hylton always knows how to manage people.

HYLTON. (*rising*). After that handsome compliment I think I'd better go upstairs. I have a letter or two to write before post—if it's not gone, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. No. The box isn't cleared till a quarter past seven. Where have you put Mr. Hylton, Margery?

MARGERY. In the Blue room, mother. If you'll come, Mr. Hylton, I'll show you where it is.

HYLTON. Thank you.

(*Exeunt* MARGERY *and* HYLTON L. *pause.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*looking after them thoughtfully*) Margery seems to have a great admiration for your Mr. Hylton, Muriel.

LADY DENISON. Yes, she thinks a great deal of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Um. . . . . Is he staying here long?

LADY DENISON. For a fortnight, I hope.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Is that *wise?*

LADY DENISON. What do you mean, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. It would be so tiresome if there were to be any foolish entanglement between him and Margery. Girls are so romantic about clergymen. And Mr. Hylton is a *sort* of clergyman, isn't he? Couldn't you send Margery away somewhere while he's here?

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LADY DENISON. But I don't want to send Margery away. How am I to entertain Miss Triggs and Mrs. Horrocks without Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Nonsense, Muriel. Do please understand that Margery's future is of more importance than entertaining Miss Triggs. If Mr. Hylton were in orders it would be different. Edward might get someone to give him a living—though livings aren't what they were of course. He might even become a bishop in time. Or at least a Dean. But as he's only some kind of dissenter there's no use thinking of that. And if he were to propose to Margery while he was down here it might give us a great deal of trouble.

LADY DENISON. But is Mr. Hylton going to propose to Margery? I've heard nothing about it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And won't—till it's too late. That kind of man has no proper feeling about these things. And of course he hasn't a sixpence.

LADY DENISON. Hasn't he, Emily? I thought he was quite well off.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What!

LADY DENISON. I thought he had quite a large income. Only he gives it all away. At least that was what Lady Wrexham told me. His place is close to theirs in Shropshire. But it's let just now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. My dear Muriel, why on earth didn't you say so before?

LADY DENISON. I didn't think you wanted to know about Mr. Hylton's income.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Not want to know? Of

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course I want to know. It makes *all* the difference. If Mr. Hylton is a rich man and has a place in Shropshire it explains everything.

LADY DENISON. (*puzzled*) Explains what?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Your asking him here. And turning your house into a bear garden because he tells you to. Of course it flatters him. And it does no harm—for once. It's not as if you need know these people afterwards.

LADY DENISON. Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I wonder what his income really is. I must find out from Lady Wrexham. It'll be a great thing to have Margery properly settled. I was always afraid you might have some difficulty in finding a really suitable husband for her. She's so very *good*. And men don't like that. It frightens them. (*rises*) Yes dear, you've done quite right. And I think you've been very clever about it. I didn't know you had it in you.

CURTAIN.

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ACT II.

SCENE.—*The same. Time. Morning a week later.* LADY DENISON DISCOVERED *conning a German Grammar.*

LADY DENISON. Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder. (*looking up from book*) Der Bruder, Des Bruder, Den Bruder. No, that's wrong. (*consults book again*) Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder. What a language! (*repeats once more with still greater stress on the "O".*)

(*Enter* MRS. EVERSLEIGH L. *carrying half finished letter.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Here you are, Muriel. I was just going to your room to find you.

LADY DENISON. Miss Triggs is in there writing letters. (*murmurs softly Der Bruder, etc.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Can you find a corner for me too? When General Bonsor and Mrs. Horrocks are in the library together I feel like Daniel in the Den of lions. It's impossible to write letters under those conditions

LADY DENISON. How tiresome. I hoped they would get on better after that scene in the drawing-room last night.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm sure I don't know why. If you ask impossible people to stay they may be civil to you but they're perfectly certain to quarrel with each other. Mr. Hylton doesn't seem to have thought of that.

LADY DENISON. What are they quarrelling about now? Was it about the Peerage again?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. Mrs. Horrocks, who really is the most vulgar person I have ever met, was explaining to Mr. Verreker that she could always tell whether a person was well-born or not the moment she set eyes on him. Good blood always told. Of course this was meant for the General whose father was a tailor in Regent Street as everybody knows. The General took up the challenge at once and growled out that good birth was all rubbish and good blood came from eating good butcher's meat, not from being fifth cousin to a Baronet. The reference was to Sir James Horrocks who is Mrs. Horrocks's second cousin twice removed as she's never tired of telling us. At that Mrs. Horrocks flushed crimson and said the General was no Gentleman. And then I came away.

LADY DENISON. Didn't Mr. Verreker manage to soothe them?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He didn't try. He seemed rather to enjoy the carnage.

LADY DENISON. I wonder if *I* ought to go? It'll interrupt my German dreadfully.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Your German?

LADY DENISON. Yes. I've had to learn German after all—to please Miss Triggs. She was

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getting restless at having nothing to do and yesterday she said she really must be thinking of getting back to her work. Which was absurd of course, as no one wants to learn German in September. However Margery said we ought to find her a pupil, just to keep her amused. So she's to teach me. (*sighs*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Why doesn't Margery learn?

LADY DENISON. Margery knows German already. Girls seem to know everything now-a-days. (*murmurs*) Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder. . . . .

(*Enter* MRS. HORROCKS *furious*, L.)

MRS. HORROCKS. Lady Denison! I really must ask you to request General Bonsor to moderate his language. I have never been treated with such disrespect in any house before.

LADY DENISON. I'm so sorry, Mrs. Horrocks. What has the General been saying?

MRS. HORROCKS. I couldn't possibly repeat it. But he has entirely forgotten the courtesy that is due to a *lady*, as I told him!

LADY DENISON. Was that wise? I should have thought it would only make the General worse.

MRS. HORROCKS. It did. He became so violent that I felt obliged to leave the room at once. General Bonsor ought to understand that this is not a barrack yard.

LADY DENISON. You must make allowances, Mrs. Horrocks. The General's temper is violent at times, but I don't think he can help it.

MRS. HORROCKS. He *ought* to help it.

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LADY DENISON. Still, he's an old man. And he's been in India. And when people have done that we must make allowances for them—on account of the climate. I hear it's so trying. And we all have failings of some kind, haven't we?

MRS. HORROCKS. (*stiffly*) I am not aware that *I* have failings.

LADY DENISON. Well. All the rest of us. Perhaps if you went back to him now you would find him a little cooler?

MRS. HORROCKS. I shall certainly not do anything so rash. If I go out on to the terrace do you think I shall be safe from his intrusion?

LADY DENISON. Perhaps that would be best. You'll find chairs out there.

(*Exit* MRS. HORROCKS L. C.)

I wonder how the General is now. Do you think I ought to send Margery to him?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Certainly not. Leave him to Mr. Verreker.

LADY DENISON. (*doubtfully*) Mr. Verreker isn't always very successful with the General. He never seems to take him seriously. And the General hates that. (*rising*) But Margery can always manage him. Do you know where she is.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. With Mr. Hylton, let's hope. Do leave *her* in peace.

LADY DENISON. Very well, Emily. Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, O—

(*Enter* MARGERY *and* VERREKER L. C.)

Margery, will you please go to the library and see

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after the General? He's been quarrelling with Mrs. Horrocks.

VERREKER. The General's not in the library now. We passed him a moment ago crossing the lawn.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*severely*) I thought you were with Mr. Hylton, Margery.

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton's correcting proofs. I've been to the kitchen garden, with Mr. Verreker, to order the vegetables for luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*tartly*) I hardly think Mr. Verreker can have been of much assistance.

VERREKER. On the contrary, I was invaluable. I prevented Miss Denison from ordering peas and substituted beans. It's too late for peas. Besides I prefer beans. And I insisted on peaches. The gardener hesitated but I was firm.

LADY DENISON. Would you mind being quite quiet all of you for the next ten minutes? Or I shall never know this declension in time for Miss Triggs. *You* might go back to the library, Emily, as the General has gone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*rising*) Well, perhaps I shall be less disturbed there. (*takes up unfinished letter*) And you'd better go to the schoolroom and practise, Margery. You'll forget your music altogether if you aren't careful.

MARGERY. Very well, Aunt Emily.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *exit* L. LADY DENISON *seats herself up stage.* MARGERY *and* VERREKER *come down.*)

LADY DENISON. (*murmurs*) Die Schwester,

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Der Schwester, Der Schwester, Die Schwester, *O* Schwester. (*aloud*) You won't mind my going on with my German, will you, Mr. Verreker? I really must get it done.

VERREKER. Not a bit. I *like* seeing other people work.

MARGERY. (*laughing*) Then you can stay and watch mother while I go and practise.

VERREKER. I'll come and watch *you*.

MARGERY. Oh no. I never allow anyone to be with me when I practise. On account of the wrong notes.

VERREKER. Well, don't practise then. Stay down here and talk.

MARGERY. And waste half the morning! Certainly not!

VERREKER. You needn't. You can work—at my handkerchief case. You're taking an awful time over it.

MARGERY. What a shame! Why I only began it two days ago and it's half finished.

VERREKER. Is it? Let me see.

MARGERY. (*takes it out of basket*) Look!

VERREKER. I say it *is* getting on.

MARGERY. (*sits by small table down* R.) Yes. There are the initials. H. V. Aren't they nice and sprawly?

VERREKER. I say it's really awfully nice of you to work it for me, Miss Denison.

MARGERY. (*beginning to work on it*) But I like working things for people.

VERREKER. Not for everybody though?

MARGERY. Oh yes, if they want them. I'm

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making a whole lot of things for the Willises' bazaar at Christmas.

VERREKER. I hope you don't class me with a beastly bazaar.

MARGERY. It'll be a very nice bazaar. It's to pay off the debt on the Parish room.

(*Pause.* VERREKER *looks at her wonderingly.*)

VERREKER. Miss Denison, don't you ever do *anything* to please yourself?

MARGERY. Of course I do. Lots of things.

VERREKER. Do you? I wish I could catch you at it.

MARGERY. What do you mean?

VERREKER. Why, you seem to me to spend your whole time looking after other people. All the morning you run round doing things for your mother.

MARGERY. I'm not "running round" now, am I?

VERREKER. No. Because you're making *me* a handkerchief case. In the afternoon if I ask you to come for a walk you insist on taking Miss Triggs or that ridiculous old General because it "wouldn't be kind not to ask them." I think that's the phrase? In the evening you play bezique to amuse Mrs. Horrocks. Don't you *occasionally* do something to amuse yourself?

MARGERY. I don't know. I've never thought about it.

VERREKER. That's just it! You've never thought about it! Well I think it's not right.

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Nobody ought to be as unselfish as all that. It shows up the rest of us too much.

MARGERY. How absurd you are.

VERREKER. I'm not absurd. Quite the contrary. I like everyone to give his mind to getting a good time for himself in this wicked world. Then I know where I am. Of course I don't mind his doing someone else a good turn now and then. But he oughtn't to *over-do* it. You *over-do* it.

MISS TRIGGS. (*putting in head* R.) I'm ready for you now, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON. Very well. (*rising*) I shall be in my room with Miss Triggs, Margery, if anyone wants me.

MARGERY. All right, mother.

LADY DENISON. (*repeating to herself*) Der apfel, Des apfels, Dem apfel, Den apfel, *O* apfel.

(*Exit* R. *Pause.*)

MARGERY. Mr. Verreker, why will you always pretend to be selfish and cynical? I'm sure you're not really.

VERREKER. I don't know about cynical, but I'm unquestionably selfish. I have no illusions whatever about that.

MARGERY. Then, why don't you try to improve?

VERREKER. I don't want to improve. I'm quite contented to be as I am.

MARGERY. Nobody can be that. We all have ideals of *some* kind.

VERREKER. Only for other people. And they're usually great nonsense. If people would only

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give up bothering about ideals and face facts what a much happier world this would be for all of us.

MARGERY. But that would be dreadful. Think what the world would lose. Think of all the saints and the martyrs who laid down their lives for ideals.

VERREKER. And think what a lot of harm they did!

MARGERY. Mr. Verreker, you *can't mean* that. You must feel sometimes how splendid it would be to do something heroic, to lay down your life for a great cause, to make the world better.

VERREKER. I don't want to make the world better. I think the world's all right as it is.

MARGERY. But you can't *always* feel like that? There must be times when you feel that the world is full of suffering and injustice. That it's not all right but all wrong?

VERREKER. Oh yes. When I'm not well, you mean.

MARGERY. No I don't. Seriously?

VERREKER. Well, sometimes perhaps—When I'm with *you* for instance—I have a dim feeling that if we all put our backs into it we might improve things. But I struggle against it.

MARGERY. Why struggle against it—if you think it would make things better?

VERREKER. Because people who try to improve the world have a very uncomfortable time, Miss Denison. And I've a great dislike of being uncomfortable.

MARGERY. Mr. Verreker!

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VERREKER. Now you're shocked. But that's inevitable, I suppose. If one only knows enough about people one always does disapprove of them.

(*Enter* HYLTON L., VERREKER *looks far from pleased at the interruption.*)

MARGERY. Have you finished your proofs, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. For this morning.

MARGERY. Then will you come here and bring Mr. Verreker to a better frame of mind. His opinions are simply dreadful—if they *are* his opinions. You must convert him.

VERREKER. (*rising*) No. If I'm to be converted—which I sincerely hope will not happen—I stipulate that it shall be by Miss Denison unaided. Two to one isn't fair. I shall go—unless Hylton does. (*takes out cigarette case*)

MARGERY. You're running away.

VERREKER. Yes—to smoke.

(*Exit* L. C. *Pause.*)

MARGERY. (*putting down work, thoughtfully*) What a curious man Mr. Verreker is.

HYLTON. Is he?

MARGERY. Yes. He looks at things so strangely. I've never met anyone quite like him before.

HYLTON. In what way?

MARGERY. In what he thinks about life—if he does think it. He says he's selfish and isn't at all ashamed of it. He says ideals do more harm than good and that he thinks the world would

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get along much better if only people would leave it alone and not keep trying to improve it. Have *you* ever met anyone who thought like that?

HYLTON. Oh, yes. It's a phase many men pass through.

MARGERY. But they do pass *through* it. They don't stay like that, I mean, do they?

HYLTON. It depends. Some men seem as if they were born blind—like kittens. Soul-blind I mean. They have no perception at all of the spiritual side of things. Then one day something opens the eyes of their soul and for the first time they *see*.

MARGERY. What kind of thing?

HYLTON. Who can say. There are many ways in which a man's soul may be awakened. A word may do it sometimes. A line in a poem, a sentence in a book. Or perhaps, someone comes into his life, someone who is kind to him or loves him and then the eyes of his soul are opened.

MARGERY. How wonderful!

HYLTON. Yes. But terrible too. For perhaps no one comes or the person who might have helped them is careless or indifferent and then they may remain blind always.

MARGERY. (*earnestly*) But Mr. Verreker—and people like him—*only* need someone to come and open their eyes?

HYLTON. Yes. Verreker's quite a good fellow I expect, underneath. He'll turn out all right if only he falls into good hands.

MARGERY. But if he falls into bad hands?

HYLTON. Then he may never make anything

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of his life. But it won't be because there was no good in him. Only because no one came to bring it out.

MARGERY. (*thoughtfully*) I see.

HYLTON. It's astonishing what a lot of *good* there is in every man if only you look deep enough for it. Men seem selfish and heartless and indifferent on the surface and all the while there's a soul in every one of them. I could give you hundreds of instances from my work among the very poor, cases of people who seemed hopelessly brutish and degraded doing kind things and generous things that would seem incredible if they were not true.

MARGERY. (*enthusiastic*) How splendid! But that was *you,* Mr. Hylton. You've such a wonderful influence with people. *You* must make Mr. Verreker *see.*

HYLTON. (*lightly*) He didn't seem very anxious to listen to *me,* Miss Denison. You must try what *you* can do.

(*Enter* ANSON L. *She looks pale and her eyes are suspiciously red. She hesitates on seeing who is in the room.*)

ANSON. I beg pardon, miss. I thought I might find her ladyship here.

MARGERY. Mother is in her room, Anson. But I think she's busy just now. Can *I* do anything?

ANSON. No, thank you, miss. I wanted to speak to her ladyship. (*going*)

MARGERY. You can see if she's engaged if you like.

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ANSON. Thank you, miss. (*crosses to door* R. *and opens it*)

(MARGERY *watches her anxiously.*)

Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON. (*off*) Yes. Come in Anson. What is it?

(*Exit* ANSON R., *closing door.*)

MARGERY. Poor mother. I expect she was delighted to be interrupted. I know *I* always was when *I* was learning German.

HYLTON. Is that your mother's maid? She looks as if she were in trouble of some kind. Is anything the matter?

MARGERY. I don't know. She's not looked herself for some time. I asked her about it a week ago. I wanted her to see the Doctor. But she wouldn't.

HYLTON. Has she been with you long?

MARGERY. Four years. I daresay it's nothing serious. Servants are so silly about what they eat. And then they wonder why they aren't well. Or she may have had some quarrel with one of the other servants. Do you find *your* servants quarrel among themselves, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. No.—You see I only keep one.

MARGERY. I sometimes wish *we* did. Only last week William actually gave mother notice just because he couldn't get on with one of the others. But mother told you about that, didn't she?

HYLTON. No.

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MARGERY. She meant to. I suppose she forgot.

(*Re-enter* ANSON R., *crying bitterly. She crosses stage rapidly and exit* L. MARGERY *and* HYLTON *look after her in amazement. Then enter* R. LADY DENISON *much flustrated.*)

LADY DENISON. Margery, will you go and find Aunt Emily for me? She's in the library, I think. I want her advice about something. And don't come back, dear, for a little.

MARGERY. Very well, mother.

(*Exit* MARGERY L.)

HYLTON. (*rising*) Perhaps I'd better. . . .?

LADY DENISON. (*fussily*) No, no, please stay, Mr. Hylton. I shall want *your* advice, too.

HYLTON. Of course if I can be of any use . . . (*re-seats himself.* LADY DENISON *sits also. Pause*)

LADY DENISON. (*half irritably, half plaintive*) Oh, why doesn't Emily come? She said she would be in the library. Surely Margery ought to have found her by this time.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *enters* L.)

Ah, here she is. Emily, a dreadful thing has happened. I thought you would advise me. (*hesitates*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*testily*) *Well,* Muriel. What is it?

LADY DENISON. Anson, my maid—you remember Anson? She came to me from Lady Carberry.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. Yes. I know. Well?

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LADY DENISON. I was in my room doing my German. Fortunately Miss Triggs had gone out into the garden for a few minutes while I was trying to learn the second declension. When Anson came in. She was evidently upset about something and looked ready to cry. In fact she *did* cry. I asked her what was the matter and she said she wanted to give notice. I was very much astonished because Anson has been with me four years and has never given me notice before. So I asked her why. And then she said that she and Soames . . . well in fact that Soames had. . . .

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Muriel! If you are about to say what I suppose you are about to say wouldn't it be better if Mr. Hylton——?

(HYLTON *rises again.*)

LADY DENISON. No, Emily. I asked Mr. Hylton particularly to remain. I shall want his advice about this. I shall want everybody's advice. Besides it's partly his fault. For if it weren't for Mr. Hylton I should never have engaged Soames.

HYLTON. I didn't know. . . .

LADY DENISON. Oh yes. Soames had a *very* bad character from his last place. In fact no character at all—which is worse. He was with the Matthisons before he came to me and Lady Frances gave the most dreadful accounts of him when Margery was staying with her. She said the champagne had disappeared in the most remarkable manner. And as for his *book* no one

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could make head or tail of it. I'm not sure there wasn't something about the plate too. Anyhow she sent him away—without a character as I said. And I always think that so hard for a servant. Don't you, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. To have no character? Very.

LADY DENISON. Well, of course, he couldn't get another place. And Lady Frances got a letter from him while Margery was there saying he was almost destitute. So Margery thought he ought to be given another chance. Mr. Hylton is always saying people ought to be given another chance. Aren't you, Mr. Hylton? And as Lady Frances didn't seem willing to have him back and Wilkins was leaving me just then—on account of Thomas—I engaged him. I wish I hadn't now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And now Soames has. . . .?

LADY DENISON. Yes. And I think it's most wicked of him. Anson has always been a good girl and her mother is a most respectful woman. However she is willing to forgive Anson and have her home I'm glad to say, so that will be all right. She has no father, luckily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, Muriel, this is what your new forms of philanthropy lead to.

LADY DENISON. It's very unfortunate. But it's done now. The question is what are you to do?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Do?* Dismiss Soames, of course. I'd better ring for him at once. (*does so*) I suppose we must let him give us *his* version of the affair before you discharge him.

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LADY DENISON. I suppose so. But it's all very painful.

(*Pause.*)

HYLTON. I'm extremely sorry, Lady Denison, if anything I have said has caused all this trouble, either to you or that poor girl. I never dreamed such a thing could occur.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really? Then you must be singularly lacking in imagination, Mr. Hylton. It seems to me the logical outcome of your theories —when applied to domestic service.

HYLTON. (*meekly*) Of course there's a danger. But all reforms have an element of danger in them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*triumphantly*) Then why reform?

HYLTON. But without reform all progress would be impossible. The world would simply stagnate. We *must* risk *something.*

LADY DENISON. Well, I'd so much rather not have risked Anson. She was such an excellent maid.

(*Enter* SOAMES L. *Pause. Silence.*)

SOAMES. Did you ring, my lady?

LADY DENISON. (*flustered*) Yes. What is this, Soames, that Anson tells me about you?

SOAMES. What *has* she told you, my lady?

LADY DENISON. That while we were in London three months ago, within a month of your coming to me in fact, you. . . . And now she's expecting a baby in the Spring.

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SOAMES. That is so, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well! Have you nothing else to say?

SOAMES. No, madam. Except of course that I'm very sorry this should have occurred?

LADY DENISON. Is that all?

SOAMES. I think that is all, my lady.

LADY DENISON. Of course you're prepared to make all the amends in your power to poor Anson?

SOAMES. Of course, my lady.

LADY DENISON. Very well then. You must marry her.

SOAMES. I'm afraid I can't do *that,* my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. There, Mr. Hylton!

LADY DENISON. Nonsense, Soames. You will be acting very wickedly if you do anything else. Anson is a good girl. A very good girl. She is the best maid I ever had, and I'm very sorry to part with her. But you have brought this disgrace on her, poor thing, and you must certainly marry her.

SOAMES. I beg pardon, my lady. I should be perfectly willing to marry Anson. She seems a very respectable young woman as you say. Unfortunately I am already married.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What!

SOAMES. I have a wife already, madam—I am sorry to say.

LADY DENISON. Really this is most unlucky. Mr. Hylton can *you* suggest anything?

HYLTON. As things stand, I'm afraid there's nothing to suggest. We must do our best for this

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poor girl, of course, and Soames must help us in any way he can. That's all that I can think of.

SOAMES. Anything *Lady Denison* thinks right, Sir, I shall be happy to fall in with.

LADY DENISON. Very well. That will do, Soames.

SOAMES. Thank you, my lady.

(*Exit* L.)

LADY DENISON. Poor Anson. I am really dreadfully sorry about her. It's such a terrible thing to happen to a girl.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) If any *other* of your converts are engaging their servants on philanthropic lines, Mr. Hylton, you had better caution them to choose single men.

LADY DENISON. James, I'm glad to say, *is* unmarried.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. James?

LADY DENISON. The boy who helps in the garden. But then he's only sixteen.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Tck!—Of course Soames must be sent away.

LADY DENISON. (*sighs*) I suppose so.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Even Mr. Hylton must see that.

HYLTON. (*thoughtfully*) I'm not sure.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Not sure! After this disgraceful affair!

HYLTON. I am thinking of the future, Mrs. Eversleigh, not of the past. I'm very sorry for what has happened to poor Anson, sorrier than I can say. But that can't be altered now. What

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is past is past. The question is how are we to help Soames?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*exasperated*) But we don't *want* to help Soames. Soames has behaved abominably.

HYLTON. (*quietly*) That's no reason for not helping him, is it?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*gasps*) It certainly seems so to *me*.

HYLTON. Surely not. Surely it's always our business to help anyone if we *can*, whatever he may have done. And in this case we *can* help Soames. If he's sent away now he may be absolutely ruined. You see it's the second place he's had to leave without a character.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) Do I understand you to consider that in his favour, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. (*mildly*) No. But it gives him an added claim on our forbearance, doesn't it?—since it makes it more difficult for him to make a fresh start.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then the more a servant disgraces himself the more we are bound to help him. And if he only does it often enough I suppose you'd pension him?

HYLTON. (*gently*) I would still try to help him, whatever he had done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Rubbish!

LADY DENISON. Hush, Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I beg your pardon, Mr. Hylton, but really this is quite preposterous. It's trying to regulate one's life by a theory instead of by the light of common sense.

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LADY DENISON. It certainly is rather confusing, you must admit, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON. (*gently*) I think my view is defensible even from the commonsense standpoint—though it's not a standpoint I set much store by. What I want—what we all want, don't we?—is to prevent Soames from sinking into destitution and so perhaps into crime.

LADY DENISON. I don't want him to do *that* of course.

HYLTON. The only way to prevent it is to get him some employment. Unhappily he is probably unfitted for anything but domestic service. The only thing to do therefore is to find him a place and give him a chance of retrieving his character. I would willingly engage him myself if I could but my establishment has no place for a highly-trained butler—or indeed for a man-servant at all. But if Lady Denison would keep him on. . . .

LADY DENISON. Oh no, I couldn't do that.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I should think not indeed!

HYLTON. (*earnestly*) It needn't be for long. Say a year. If at the end of that time his work and his conduct generally have been satisfactory Lady Denison can then send him away with a character and he'll be able to get another place.

LADY DENISON. But I sha'n't want to send him away if his conduct is satisfactory.

HYLTON. Then why not try the experiment? Of course I'm now putting this on the lowest grounds, the commonsense grounds. Morally it needs no defence. One should always forgive wrong-doing, shouldn't one?

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LADY DENISON. I can't think that, Mr. Hylton. Wicked people *must* be punished. If they weren't it would be so discouraging for good people.

HYLTON. Wicked people are only weak people, Lady Denison. If they were strong they would resist temptation. But they are weak and they yield to it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*with decision*) If Soames is unable to resist temptation of *this* kind, I think Muriel had certainly better discharge him, on account of the other maids.

HYLTON. I don't think he'll offend in this way again. He's had a lesson.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He had a lesson at the Matthisons'.

HYLTON. And profited by it. He has been quite honest since he came to you, hasn't he, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON. I believe so.

HYLTON. Very well, then. The experiment answered in that case.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Oh come, Mr. Hylton, we must be *practical.* Of course this idea about being kind to unpleasant people and worthless people and in fact to everybody one doesn't like and oughtn't to like, *sounds* very nice. But it's not *practical.*

HYLTON. Well, Lady Denison. It's for you to decide.

LADY DENISON. That's just it. I do so hate deciding things. If only I could ask Margery.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Certainly not.

HYLTON. (*earnestly*) It may save a soul.

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LADY DENISON. Do you really think that?

(HYLTON *nods.*)

How very annoying! However if that's so, I suppose he must stay. (*sighs*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Muriel!

LADY DENISON. Well Emily, what *can* I do? If Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON. I do think so. Thank you so much, Lady Denison. I'm sure you'll never regret it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I'm quite sure she will. And I think it's very wrong of you, Mr. Hylton, to make my sister-in-law behave in this way. She doesn't like it.

HYLTON. You exaggerate my influence, Mrs. Eversleigh. It is Lady Denison's own goodness of heart that makes her want to help people. Without that I should be powerless.

LADY DENISON. How nice of you to say that, Mr. Hylton! But you always say the right thing. I was really feeling dreadfully dispirited about all this and you've driven it all away. There's nothing like *tact,* is there?

(*Enter* GENERAL BONSOR L. C.)

Is that you, General? Have you been in the garden with Mrs. Horrocks?

GENERAL BONSOR. (*frowning sternly*) I have *not,* Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON. Oh no, to be sure, I forgot. . . . I mean I remember. . . . Just so.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*severely*) I have been in the Rose-garden smoking a cigar.

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LADY DENISON. That's so kind of you. It's so good for the roses.

GENERAL BONSOR. Where Mrs. Horrocks is I have no idea.

(*Exit* L. *head in air.*)

LADY DENISON. Dear me, why *did* I say that! Of course I oughtn't even to have *mentioned* Mrs. Horrocks. But I'd forgotten all about their quarrel this morning. This affair of Soames quite put it out of my head. And now I suppose the General will be offended. Really what with quarrels among one's visitors and scandal in the Servants' Hall life is hardly worth living.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) Mr. Hylton's system!

HYLTON. (*rising*) Shall I go and pacify the General?

LADY DENISON. If you would, Mr. Hylton. It really is scarcely safe to leave him alone just now, in case Mrs. Horrocks should come in.

(*Exit* HYLTON L.)

It's been a very *tiring* morning, hasn't it, Emily.

(MISS TRIGGS *puts her head in* R.)

MISS TRIGGS. I've been waiting for you nearly twenty minutes, Lady Denison. Is that declension ready now?

LADY DENISON. Oh dear, I'm afraid not. I've really had no time to attend to it since you left me, Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS. (*sternly, coming* C.) No *time?*

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LADY DENISON. No. I'm *so* sorry. I was called away on urgent *business*. Most urgent business. And it's no good trying to do anything before luncheon now, is it? It will be ready in two or three minutes.

MISS TRIGGS. I am afraid it is useless for me to attempt to teach you German, Lady Denison, if you are unwilling to give even the *small* amount of time I ask to studying it.

LADY DENISON. (*meekly*) But really, Miss Triggs. . . .

MISS TRIGGS. Apologies are unnecessary. I am accustomed to be treated in this way. It is the experience of all women, I believe, who earn their living by education. (*crosses* L.)

LADY DENISON. I assure you. . . .

MISS TRIGGS. You need not. I *quite* understand. We will abandon our lesson until later in the day when you may have leisure to apply yourself to it. (*sweeps out* L.)

LADY DENISON. Now *she's* offended. Really it's *too* bad!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Mr. Hylton's system!

LADY DENISON. I'd no idea people who taught German were so sensitive. I ought never to have said I would learn it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. You ought never to have asked Miss Triggs here at all. Nor any of these people. Mrs. Horrocks, General Bonsor, Mr. Verreker. They're all impossible.

LADY DENISON. I don't see what's the matter with Mr. Verreker. *He's* not been doing anything tiresome, has he?

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(MARGERY *and* VERREKER *appear on terrace* R. C. *Then* MARGERY *runs in excitedly by window* L. C. *holding* VERREKER *by hand.*)

MARGERY. Mother dear, is that you? (*kisses her*) I've got *such* a piece of news for you. What do you think? Hugh and I are engaged to be married!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Hugh?

MARGERY. (*turning to her*) Mr. Verreker. (*to her mother again, speaking very rapidly and excitedly*) He asked me to marry him down by the lake and I said I would. Aren't you *pleased!*

LADY DENISON. Margery!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really!

(*Gong rings loudly off.*)

MARGERY. Oh, there's the luncheon gong and my hands are simply piggy. We've been grubbing up ferns for my rockery. So are yours, Hugh. Run and wash them, dear. You must wait to be congratulated till afterwards.

VERREKER. All right.

(*Exit* VERREKER L., MARGERY *going also.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I must say!

MARGERY. I can't stop now, Aunt Emily, or we shall be late and then the General will be furious.

(*Exit* L.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And *you* said Margery was going to marry Mr. Hylton! Muriel, you must be a perfect fool.

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LADY DENISON. (*almost weeping*) I didn't, Emily! *You* said it!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, there's no use arguing about that now. You must put a stop to this engagement without a moment's delay.

LADY DENISON. Yes. I shall speak to Margery about it directly after luncheon. It's very naughty of her. I shall certainly refuse to sanction the engagement.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Better speak to her at once.

LADY DENISON. I think I'll wait till after luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Mr. Hylton again. If it weren't for him Mr. Verreker would never have been invited to stay.

LADY DENISON. (*regretfully*) Yes. I really must give up going to hear Mr. Hylton. The results are *too* unpleasant. I didn't mind asking the wrong people to the house and trying to make them happy. But I can't have them proposing to my daughter. I must make a stand against it all, now, at once, while I remember. (*goes to bell and rings majestically.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. What are you going to do?

LADY DENISON. Dismiss Soames!

CURTAIN.

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ACT III.

SCENE *the same. Time an hour later. Luncheon is just over. When the Curtain rises the stage is empty. Then enter* L., LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, MARGERY, GENERAL BONSOR, HYLTON, VERREKER.

(*French windows* R. C. *and* L. C. *are both open in this act.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*heard off and then entering*) . . . It was at Jubbulpore it happened. We were up there after Pig. Travers was there, I remember, and Hindley of the 106th. No not Hindley. He died the year before. Bellairs. First-rate chap Bellairs. In the police. I'll tell you a story about *him* some day. He married Molly Henderson, daughter of old Henderson the judge. Fat Henderson we used to call him because he was so stout. Well, as I was saying, Travers and I were alone together. . . .

VERREKER. (*to* MARGERY) Poor Travers!

GENERAL BONSOR. (*wheeling round*) What, sir!

VERREKER. Nothing.

GENERAL BONSOR. Did I hear you remark, *Poor* Travers?

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VERREKER. I hope not, General. You were not intended to.

GENERAL BONSOR. *Did* you remark it, sir?

LADY DENISON. I think you must have misunderstood Mr. Verreker, General.

MRS. HORROCKS. (*acidly*) And anyhow the subject is scarcely worth pursuing, is it? Unless we are to be kept listening to this story the *whole* afternoon.

GENERAL BONSOR. I had not intended to detain Mrs. Horrocks. (*glares*)

MARGERY. Don't you think we'd better all go out for a walk while the sunshine lasts? It's a pity not to make the most of it.

LADY DENISON. Margery, I——

MARGERY. Yes, mother. In a moment. Mrs. Horrocks, you'll come, won't you?

MRS. HORROCKS. Thank you. I shall be delighted.

MARGERY. Miss Triggs?

(MISS TRIGGS *nods.*)

General?

GENERAL BONSOR. (*decidedly*) No, thank ye.

(*Enter* WILLIAM L.)

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. I'm afraid I must stay at home and finish my proofs.

LADY DENISON. Margery, I want to speak to you before—What is it? (*to* WILLIAM)

WILLIAM. (*to* LADY DENISON, *holding out salver*) The post, my lady. (LADY DENISON *takes*

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them) And could Mrs. Meredith speak to you for a moment?

LADY DENISON. Oh, very well.

(*Exit* L.)

MARGERY. That makes three. Who else?

WILLIAM. (*to* GENERAL BONSOR) A letter for you, sir.

(GENERAL BONSOR *takes one.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. Thank ye.

(*Exit* WILLIAM L.)

Excuse me. (*opens and begins to read*)

MARGERY. Will you come, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. No, thanks. I am going to drive with your mother.

MARGERY. Very well. Hugh, four. That'll be all.

VERREKER. You don't ask whether *I* want to come.

MARGERY. You've got to come whether you like it or not. As a penance.

VERREKER. All right. If it's clearly understood that it's a penance. I'd rather like a walk.

MARGERY. Let's all go and get ready then. Come, Mrs. Horrocks. Meet in the hall in five minutes.

(*Exeunt* L., MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, MARGERY *and* VERREKER, *pause*, HYLTON *has picked up a review and is glancing at one of the articles idly.* GENERAL BONSOR *is reading his letter.*)

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HYLTON. This article in the *Fortnightly* on Farm Colonies is worth reading, Mrs. Eversleigh.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Thank you. I've had *quite* enough philanthrophy lately without that! (*another pause*)

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *takes up book and appears to read.*)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*looking up from letter*) Well!!!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*irritably*) Really, General Bonsor, these sudden exclamations are most disconcerting. Is anything the matter?

GENERAL BONSOR. Mrs. Eversleigh *is* Lady Denison aware of the character of that young man?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Of Mr. Hylton?

GENERAL BONSOR. No! No! Of that young man who has just left the room. What's his name? Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I don't know. You'd better ask her.

GENERAL BONSOR. I shall certainly do so. I venture to think she is *not* aware of it. I venture to think that when she has read what my old friend Nicholson, Toby Nicholson, says about him (*taps letter fiercely*) she will scarcely consider him a fit person to invite to meet *me!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I shouldn't build on that if I were you. My sister has peculiar views about hospitality.

GENERAL BONSOR. Can you tell me where I shall find her?

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. She'll be back in a moment. I believe she only went to speak to the housekeeper. Here she is.

(*Re-enter* LADY DENISON L.)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*breaking out*) Lady Denison. . . .

LADY DENISON. (*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *fussily*) Emily, the *cook* wants to leave now. She has found out about Anson and says she can't remain with me after the month. I told her Soames was leaving, but she said . . . I beg your pardon, General. I thought Emily was alone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. General Bonsor has some news to communicate to you about Mr. Verreker. I needn't say of an unfavourable character.

LADY DENISON. Emily! (*collapses*)

HYLTON. (*rising*) Perhaps I'd better. . . .

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) On the contrary. Mr. Hylton had better remain. It's all *his* doing, as usual.

HYLTON. Mine?

LADY DENISON. Never mind that now, Emily. But General if you *have* anything unpleasant to say, *will* you say it as quickly as possible? Then we shall get it over.

GENERAL BONSOR. I will do so, Lady Denison. (*clears his throat*) I have just received a letter from my friend Colonel Nicholson who commands the Munster Regiment. Nicholson is an old friend of mine. I met him first at Poonah in '72 . . . or was it '73. . . .

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) *Please* do not bother about *dates,* General Bonsor. If you will *kindly* come to the *point.*

GENERAL BONSOR. Certainly, Mrs. Eversleigh. I wrote to Colonel Nicholson a week ago. And as I happened to hear Verreker say he had been in the Munsters I mentioned that he was staying down here. The Munsters are the Old 43rd, you know. The Fighting Forty-Third. I remember them in the old days when Tom Ferguson was in command. Ferguson and I. . . .

LADY DENISON. (*pathetically*) General *would* you mind leaving that part out and telling us what Colonel Nicholson said about Mr. Verreker —if he said anything? It's really important.

GENERAL BONSOR. (*stiffly*) I was about to do so—when you interrupted me, Lady Denison. I will do so now. Colonel Nicholson says . . . where the deuce does he say it? I'll give it you in his own words. (*fumbles for glasses,* LADY DENISON *wild with nervous impatience*) "I'm surprised to hear you've got young Verreker staying with you—(*looks up at* LADY DENISON) he means with *you,* of course—I thought people fought rather shy of asking him. Small blame to 'em. He got into an ugly scrape while he was with us. Spent money belonging to the mess which he couldn't pay back. Might have gone to prison if the thing hadn't been hushed up. Had to send in his papers. Deuced ugly business altogether. Old Wakley whom you remember at Dum Dum. . . . That's all.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. There, Mr. Hylton!

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HYLTON. (*puzzled*) What is it, Mrs. Eversleigh? I'm really quite in the dark.

LADY DENISON. Hush, Emily. You forgot Mr. Hylton doesn't know yet. Nobody knows. General, would you mind leaving us with Mr. Hylton for a few minutes. My sister-in-law and I would like to consult him. We are *very* much obliged to you for letting us hear the letter—and would you please go at once?

GENERAL BONSOR. Certainly.

(*Exit* L. C., *much offended.*)

LADY DENISON. Mr. Hylton, what is to be done! You heard what General Bonsor said about Mr. Verreker just now? Mr. Verreker proposed to my daughter this morning and she accepted him.

HYLTON. Impossible!

LADY DENISON. I wish it were. Margery came and told us about it just before luncheon. Of course I was most indignant and meant to tell her at once that I couldn't think of allowing it, but the luncheon gong rang and I've had no opportunity of speaking to her since. And it's all your fault, Mr. Hylton, as Emily says, for if it hadn't been for you I should never have asked Mr. Verreker to the house. I really knew nothing about him and only did it out of kindness. And now the General tells us this!

HYLTON. Lady Denison, I can't say how distressed I am that this has occurred. I would have done anything to prevent it.

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) I'm glad to find there are limits even to *your* toleration, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON. Surely you never supposed I could approve of such a marriage?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*sarcastically*) I don't know. You champion Miss Triggs as a visitor—and Soames as a Butler. Why not Mr. Verreker as a son-in-law?

HYLTON. (*distressed*) You can't really think that, Mrs. Eversleigh. Knowing what I now know about Verreker how could I possibly think him a fit husband for a girl like Miss Denison!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, well, you don't think so. That's the main thing. The question is what is to be done?

LADY DENISON. Of course I shall forbid the engagement. I meant to do so before. But this puts it absolutely out of the question.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And Mr. Hylton must use his influence with Margery. It's the least he can do.

HYLTON. Anything I can do, Mrs. Eversleigh, you may be quite sure will be done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And let's hope she'll prove amenable for everybody's sake.

HYLTON. I've no fears on *that* score. When Miss Denison learns Verreker's true character she won't *wish* to marry him any longer. It would be impossible.

LADY DENISON. (*eagerly*) Yes. Wouldn't it! It's not as if Margery were an *unprincipled* girl or a *bad* girl in any way. She's a very *good* girl.

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And a *religious* girl. And so she'll do what we tell her.

HYLTON. (*who has been pacing restlessly about and is now by window* R. C.) Here *is* Miss Denison coming across the lawn. With Verreker.

LADY DENNISON. With Mr. Verreker? *How* unfortunate!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I don't see that it matters. He would have to be told what we think about him in any case. Why not now?

LADY DENISON. (*flustered*) Very well. You must help me, Mr. Hylton. I'm so unaccustomed to having to manage Margery. She generally manages me.

(*Enter* MARGERY L. C., *helping* VERREKER, *who limps a little.*)

MARGERY. Is that you, mother? Poor Hugh has sprained his ankle. (*to* VERREKER) Be careful of that step. (*to* LADY DENISON) Isn't it unfortunate? He slipped as we were going down the bank in the old Spinney. I sent the others on and brought him back by the short way across the lawn. (*to* VERREKER) Is it hurting much?

VERREKER. Oh no. It's nothing.

MARGERY. Sit down here. (*drags up sofa*) And you must put your foot up and give it a complete rest. And if it's not better this evening we'll send for Dr. Jenkins. Wasn't it lucky we hadn't got farther from the house when it happened, mother. It's so bad to walk with a sprain.

VERREKER. It's not a sprain really, Margery. Just a twist. That's all.

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LADY DENISON. Will you please not call my daughter Margery, Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY. Not call me Margery? But, mother we're *engaged!*

LADY DENISON. You are *not* engaged, Margery. I cannot allow you to be engaged—at least not to Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY. Why not, mother?

LADY DENISON. He knows quite well. And I think he's not behaved honourably in *asking* you to be engaged to him. When you know his true character you will think so too.

MARGERY. Do you mean about his leaving the army?

LADY DENISON. Yes.

MARGERY. But I know about that.

LADY DENISON. I don't think you do. Not *all* about it. You imagine, as I did, that he left the army because he had been foolish or got into debt or something. It was not that. Mr. Verreker left the army for a far more serious reason which you know nothing about.

MARGERY. Oh yes I do, mother dear. Hugh told me *all* about it this morning.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. He *told* you!

MARGERY. Yes. Before he asked me to marry him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really!

LADY DENISON. Margery! It's impossible. You would never have accepted him if he had told you. Mr. Verreker is not a fit person for any girl to marry. He is dishonest.

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MARGERY. (*laying hand instinctively on* HUGH'S *shoulder*) Mother!

LADY DENISON. He spent money that didn't belong to him, money that had been entrusted to him.

MARGERY. I know. And when the time came he couldn't pay it back. He told me all that quite fully before he proposed to me. I thought it was very honourable of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Honourable!

MARGERY. Yes. Wasn't it honourable? To tell me I mean. He might have said nothing about it, or at least concealed the worst part hoping we should never find out. But he didn't. He told me everything. I think that was partly what made me say "yes."

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Margery! You must be out of your senses.

MARGERY. Why? It's all over now, quite over and done with. What is past is past. It happened four years ago. Surely we might forget it now?

LADY DENISON. No, Margery. A thing like this can never be forgotten.

MARGERY. I can't think that. One should always forgive wrong-doing, shouldn't one? And if one forgives why not forget?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Rubbish!

LADY DENISON. Mr. Verreker I must speak very seriously to my daughter about this. But there's no need for *you* to stay if you'd rather not. It would only be painful for you to hear. Would you rather leave us for a little?

VERREKER. (*calmly*) Thank you, Lady Deni-

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son. I don't mind. (*settles himself on his sofa, pause*)

MARGERY. Mother, aren't you all being rather hard on poor Hugh? We all do things we're ashamed of sometimes. Not quite the same things as this perhaps, but still *wrong* things. And if we're sorry and try not to do them again oughtn't that to be enough?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*snaps*) No!

MARGERY. (*confidently*) I'm sure Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON. No, Miss Denison. In this matter I agree with Mrs. Eversleigh.

MARGERY. Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON. Your mother has told you what she wishes. I think you should obey her. It is your duty. (*pause*)

MARGERY. (*slowly*) Of course one should obey one's parents I know. . . . But there are other duties as well.

HYLTON. (*earnestly*) Miss Denison I've no right to speak to you about this or to urge you in any way. And if you resent it I cannot complain. But the friendship I feel for you and your mother, the kindness you have always shown me, makes me risk that. Break off this engagement! Break it off I beg of you. It is impossible that a girl like you should be happy with such a man as Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY. (*quite simply*) But one shouldn't only think of *happiness* when one marries should one?

HYLTON. What do you mean?

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MARGERY. I mean there are other things. One would like to be happy of course. But other things are more important. Helping people for instance.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*scandalised*) Are you going to marry Mr. Verreker because you want to *help* him?

MARGERY. Of course. This morning when Mr. Hylton and I were talking about Hugh he said there was so much that was good in him that only needed bringing out. That the eyes of his soul had not been opened yet. And he said that if he fell into good hands he would be all right, but if he fell into bad hands he might go on being careless and indifferent always. So I thought if he married me I might prevent him from falling into bad hands.

HYLTON. (*much distressed*) But when I was talking to you about Mr. Verreker this morning I never dream'd of your *marrying* him.

MARGERY. Nor did I—then. But afterwards, when he asked me, I remembered. And so I said yes. I'm sure I did right. (*lays hand on* VERREKER'S)

HYLTON. Miss Denison, this is terrible. I assure you what you are doing is not right but wrong. It is quite right that you should want to help Mr. Verreker, of course. But it is not right that you should marry him.

MARGERY. But perhaps it is only by marrying Hugh that I *can* help him? You see it's not easy for a girl to help a man however much she may wish to. They see so little of each other. And if

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you're really to influence people you must be *with* them, mustn't you? But when people are married they are always together and then it's easy. So I'm sure I'm doing right in marrying Hugh. When a girl marries she should choose someone she can do *good* to, someone who *needs* her. Now I think perhaps Hugh *does* need me for he's not always been a very *good* man so far. He's been lazy and rather selfish and not very thoughtful for others. I'm going to cure him of *that!* Am I not, Hugh?

VERREKER. (*half smiling*) If you can, Margery.

MARGERY. And that's really *worth* doing, isn't it! You see if I married a *good* man—like you, Mr. Hylton—I couldn't help *him* at all. He'd be quite good already. But Hugh has done foolish things and wrong things as we know. I can *help* him.

LADY DENISON. Margery, I think you ought to listen to what Mr. Hylton says and what I say and do what we ask. It's very wrong of you to be so obstinate. You know we're thinking only of your good.

MARGERY. Yes, but are you thinking of *Hugh's* good, mother?

LADY DENISON. (*plaintively*) What *does* she mean?

MARGERY. Would it help *him* if I broke it off?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Tck! Who ever heard of marrying a man to *help* him.

MARGERY. Why not, Aunt Emily? Mr. Hyl-

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ton always says the only real way of helping people is to love them. And if one *loves* people of course one should *marry* them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Loves* them! So that's it, is it! You're not marrying Mr. Verreker because you want to help him but because you've fallen in love with him. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MARGERY. Of course I love Hugh. What is there to be ashamed of in that?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*angrily*) Is there nothing to be ashamed of in wanting to marry a worthless man knowing him to be worthless? You have heard of men marrying worthless women I suppose? Nobody thinks *they're* performing a moral duty and setting an example to their fellows. On the contrary we think them weak or vicious. What you are doing is exactly what they do. Only they have the grace not to talk morality about it.

MARGERY. I don't expect *you* to understand, Aunt Emily. You never do like the way mother and I look at things, do you?

LADY DENISON. (*plaintively*) Oh, don't bring *me* into this, please.

MARGERY. Very well, mother. But I did think *you* would be on my side. And Mr. Hylton. I love Hugh and I want to help him. There's nothing strange in that is there? When one wants to help people one always does get to love them. That's the splendid thing about helping people. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, there's no use argu-

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ing with Margery while she's like this. She evidently has no moral sense whatever!

LADY DENISON. Mr. Verreker, I appeal to *you*. You see what Margery is doing. Release her from this engagement She is merely sacrificing herself from a fantastic sense of duty.

VERREKER. (*with dangerous politeness*) Surely not? If so I have gravely misunderstood Mrs. Eversleigh. I thought it was Margery's fantastic sense of *affection* she objected to?

MARGERY. Hugh dear!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. If you are going to insult me, Mr. Verreker. . . . !

VERREKER. I really beg your pardon. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But some not very pleasant things have been said about *me*, haven't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. And with reason. A man of your antecedents has no right to propose to the daughter of the house in which he is staying. It is taking advantage of her inexperience. It is dishonourable.

VERREKER. Is that so? Then I'm probably rather lacking in the finer sense about these things. . . But I suppose everyone is inclined to find excuses for his own misdeeds while remaining inflexibly severe towards his neighbours'. That's the foundation of all morality, isn't it, Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I should have thought *stealing*. . . !

VERREKER. Yes. Stealing's an ugly word, isn't it? It even makes *me* uncomfortable. . . And yet if you understood the whole circum-

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stances you might take a more lenient view. But that of course would be a very bad thing for morality. So no doubt you'd rather not.

HYLTON. Lady Denison, if Mr. Verreker has anything to tell you that will put a more favorable light on the General's story. . . .

VERREKER. The General's? So *he* told you?

LADY DENISON. He heard it from Colonel Nicholson who commands your old regiment.

VERREKER. Yes, yes. I remember. He said he was writing to him. Poor General, so he really has been able to finish a story for once!

HYLTON. I was going to say that it would be only fair to give Mr. Verreker every chance of defending himself.

VERREKER. Oh I don't think it amounts to a defence. Merely a statement of the case from the person who knows most about it—the criminal as Mrs. Eversleigh would say.—I was an extravagant young fool. The regiment was an expensive one. I had a small allowance. I had lost money over cards—and other things—to richer men than I was—who by the way ought never to have played with me at all. Like an idiot I thought I must pay my debts to *them* whatever happened. You know the nonsense that is talked about a debt of honour. To do that I used money belonging to the mess which happened to be in my hands. Of course I hoped to pay it back at once or I shouldn't have done it. Equally of course I failed to do so. The horse that was simply bound to win lost and I played cards for a whole week and never held a trump. The usual thing. When

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things were pretty desperate I cabled to Uncle Montague—I was in India at the time—asking him to send me a hundred pounds by return. Of course I lied to him about the reason. Everybody does lie I suppose about that sort of reason. I said I owed it to tailors and people I remember. Naturally Uncle Mont didn't see the force of sending me a hundred pounds without haggling about it. Uncles always do haggle about money, I believe. At least mine do. So Uncle Mont haggled and like a young ass instead of going straight to the Colonel or the money-lenders I faked the accounts. It was purely a temporary expedient. I knew the money would turn up in a week or two. It was merely a question of gaining time. But as luck would have it someone with an elementary knowledge of arithmetic happened to glance at the accounts. He spotted something was wrong and told the others and instead of coming to me they went to the Colonel. The Colonel sent for me and there was no end of a row. I tried to make him understand but he couldn't. The stupidity of military men has been proverbial in all ages. I'm a bit of a fool myself as you will have noticed. He stormed and I was sulky. My borrowing the money intending to repay it he could *just* understand but faking the accounts to conceal the fact was beyond him. Though it was the logical consequence of the other if the thing was to be kept dark. When the fat was in the fire Uncle Mont's cheque turned up. But by that time we'd all lost our tempers,

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the Colonel was prancing round about the honour of the Regiment, and I had to send in my papers.

HYLTON. (*half to himself*) Poor fellow.

VERREKER. Eh?

HYLTON. Nothing.

MARGERY. (*triumphant*) Mr. Hylton I knew *you'd* understand. Thank you. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) Well Mr. Verreker you've made out a very clever case and you've put it very glibly. It must have taken you some time to prepare.

VERREKER. Just four years, Mrs. Eversleigh. It happened four years ago and I've not had much else to think of since. It was a confoundedly silly thing to do as I said and I've been wondering ever since how I came to do it. The result of my consideration is the story I've told you. I don't ask you to believe it of course. But it's quite true.

HYLTON. *I* believe it, Verreker. And I'm more sorry for you than I can say. If I've said anything that was harsh or unjustifiable please forgive me.

VERREKER. Not at all, my dear fellow.

LADY DENISON. It's all dreadfully sad, Mr. Verreker. I see that. But still it doesn't alter the facts, does it? You have had to leave the army. Your reputation is ruined. And that makes you not a fit husband for Margery.

VERREKER. I feel that, Lady Denison.

MARGERY. Hugh!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then why did you propose to her?

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VERREKER. (*shrugs*) A sudden impulse I suppose. That's how most people propose isn't it? If they stopped to think they'd think better of it, and then no one would ever marry at all. Which would perhaps be the wisest plan for all parties.

LADY DENISON. Still in your case you must admit there were special reasons?

VERREKER. I don't know. How many men are fit husbands for the girls they marry? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? Girls are so ridiculously innocent. And men are so ridiculously depraved. I'm not so very much worse than the others. Only I was stupider. And that ruined me. But it was four years ago. And I'm not likely to do it again. A man doesn't play the fool like that twice. One pays too dear for it. Considered as a husband I'm probably the better for the experience. I've learnt by it. (*pause*)

LADY DENISON. Mr. Verreker, what you say is quite true and I daresay you're not really worse than many men, though the world judges things like this more hardly than other things. But we are *in* the world and we must accept its judgment as we cannot alter it. If you marry Margery *she* will have to suffer for what *you* have done. I don't think you want her to do that. Be generous and release her from her promise.

VERREKER. My dear Lady Denison I put myself entirely in Margery's hands. If she wishes to end our engagement she is absolutely free to do so. I assert no claim over her whatever. I agree with you that she would only be acting

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wisely to break it off and I sha'n't dream of blaming her if she does so. But you mustn't ask *me* to break it off. A man can't do that. But if Margery wants her freedom she has only to speak.

HYLTON. (*enthusiastic*) That's fine of you, Verreker. That's noble on my soul. You really *are* a good fellow. I know what it must cost you to give up a girl like Miss Denion. I honour you for it. (*Holds out hand*)

VERREKER. (*taking it*) Thanks, my dear chap. But you mustn't be too precipitate. I haven't given her up yet. Margery hasn't spoken.

LADY DENISON. Margery dear you *will* break it off?

MARGERY. No, mother. As long as Hugh wants me I shall stand by him.

LADY DENISON. Then you don't love your mother.

(MARGERY *runs impulsively to her mother and kisses her.*)

MARGERY. Of course I love you, mother dear. But I love Hugh too. (*pause*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Well, I suppose there's no more to be said. If Margery is determined to ruin herself nobody can prevent her. *You* of course will continue to forbid the engagement, Muriel, but Margery is of age and if she chooses to defy you and marry this Mr. Verreker she can do so. But in that case I hope you will entirely refuse to make her any allowance and in fact will disinherit her.

LADY DENISON. What nonsense, Emily. Of

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course Margery must have an allowance. What else is she to live on? Especially as I suppose Mr. Verreker has nothing?

VERREKER. Next to nothing.

LADY DENISON. Very well then. Naturally I shall have to help them. And as for disinheriting her that's impossible even if it were just, as I've no other children. No, Margery must be provided for in any case. I'm sorry she is unwilling to do as I wish and I think this engagement terribly unwise and unsuitable. But I suppose she's very fond of Hugh just as I was very fond of Charlie—before I married him. And so she must do as she likes.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *gives up the struggle in despair and opens her book again with a shrug.*)

MARGERY. Darling mother! (*embraces her*) Now you're being like yourself again instead of being like Aunt Emily—which doesn't suit you one bit. I always knew you'd agree with me really—and Mr. Hylton—though you took rather longer than I expected. Hugh, give mother a kiss like a dutiful son-in-law and say you think her the best woman in the world.

VERREKER. (*drily*) I think I'll spare poor Lady Denison *that.* She's had a great deal to put up with during the past hour.

MARGERY. Poor mother, I suppose she has.

VERREKER. I hope however later on she'll get more reconciled to things. She can't really dislike me as much as she thinks, otherwise she wouldn't have asked me here.

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(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *closes her book deliberately with a smile of malicious satisfaction.*)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*with bitter politeness*) I'm afraid I really must disabuse you of *that* idea, Mr. Verreker. My sister-in-law has curious views of hospitality. She doesn't ask people to her house because she likes them or thinks them pleasant acquaintances, but because they are disagreeable or disreputable or haven't anywhere else to go. It's a new form of philanthropy. Mr. Hylton invented it.

(VERREKER *bursts into a shout of delighted laughter.*)

(*icily*) You seem amused.

VERREKER. I am. How delicious! So *that's* why I was invited! Because I was down on my luck and wasn't asked to many houses. And I thought it was because of my delightful society.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*venomously*) You were certainly strangely mistaken.

VERREKER. (*laughing again*) So it seems. And *that* explains why all these other people are here I suppose? I *thought* they were rather a damaged lot. Old Bonsor, Miss Triggs, Firket, that appalling Mrs. Horrocks, Hylton, who's an excellent chap but quite mad. And you too, I dare say, Mrs. Eversleigh. . . . ?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *I*, sir! Certainly not! *I* am here because I am Lady Denison's sister-in-law.

VERREKER. That's no reason. Lots of people

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hate their sisters-in-law. I know I simply loathe my brothers.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. I am glad to think that Lady Denison is unlike you in that as in every respect.

LADY DENISON. *Of course,* Emily. I asked you because I like to have you here. And Mr. Hylton too. I must invite the people I like *occasionally.*

VERREKER. I see. Well, Lady Denison, I think it's a splendid idea of yours, far more amusing than the ordinary way of inviting people. And the more dreadful they are the more amusing it must be. Margery and I must certainly take to it when *we* have a house.

LADY DENISON. I don't see anything *amusing* in it, Mr. Verreker. In fact it's often extremely unpleasant and leads to most regrettable complications.

VERREKER. Such as *my* getting engaged to Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) That among other things.

VERREKER. Do none of them *know?*

LADY DENISON. No.

VERREKER. Why not? They'd be awfully amused.

(GENERAL *is heard approaching window* R. C. *humming a song.*)

By Jove, here *is* the General. I *must* tell *him.*

LADY DENISON. Please! Please!

VERREKER. Yes I *must.* I owe him one for

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telling you all that about me. *You* owe him one too. He's given you a most uncomfortable afternoon.

(*Enter* GENERAL R. C.)

GENERAL BONSOR. (*taking out watch*) Isn't it tea time, Lady Denison? I think so.

VERREKER. Long past. I say, General, why have you been telling tales about me to Lady Denison?

GENERAL BONSOR. (*gobbling*) If it comes to my knowledge, sir, that a man who is staying in a lady's house with me is not a person whom *other* people wish to meet I make it a rule to inform my hostess of the fact.

VERREKER. (*heartily*) And a very good rule too. Only Lady Denison doesn't ask people to her house whom *other* people wish to meet. It's against her principles.

LADY DENISON. (*protesting*) Mr. Verreker!

GENERAL BONSOR. (*gobbling again*) Upon my word, Sir. . . . . !

(MRS. HORROCKS *and* MISS TRIGGS *enter unnoticed* L. C. *and stand listening.*)

VERREKER. Lady Denison selects her visitors on philanthropic grounds—because they're disagreeable or disreputable or merely boring. It's a form of self-denial with her. That's why she asked you. That's why she asked me. That's why she asked all of us.

GENERAL BONSOR. What!

MRS. HORROCKS. What! ! !

VERREKER. (*seeing* MRS. HORROCKS *for the*

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first time. To himself) Good Heavens! Mrs. Horrocks!

MRS. HORROCKS. (*with awful dignity*) Yes, Sir, Mrs. Horrocks. Miss Triggs and I returned from our walk just in time to hear your extraordinary statement. (*bleat from* MISS TRIGGS) May I ask what truth, if any, it contains?

VERREKER. Really, Mrs. Horrocks, I'm very sorry you should have heard what I said. . . .

MRS. HORROCKS. (*sternly*) Is it true, sir? (VERREKER *makes hopeless gesture, but says nothing*) Lady Denison, perhaps *you* will inform me?

GENERAL BONSOR. (*more in sorrow than in anger*) *Why* was I invited here, Lady Denison?

MISS TRIGGS. And *I?*

LADY DENISON. (*completely flustered*) I never meant you to know. I never meant Mr. Verreker to know. It's very unfortunate. Please accept my apologies all of you. I'm most distressed this should have happened.

MRS. HORROCKS. Then it *is* true!

MISS TRIGGS. Really!

LADY DENISON. (*meekly*) I don't think Mr. Verreker need have told the General. It was most inconsiderate of him. But I hope you won't hold *me* responsible.

MISS TRIGGS. (*icily*) Will you kindly order the carriage to take me to the station, Lady Denison? I shall leave by the six o'clock train.

MRS. HORROCKS. Of course you will not expect *me* to remain.

GENERAL BONSOR. Nor me! Boring!

LADY DENISON. (*much distressed*) Oh *need*

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you all go like that? After all there's nothing so very dreadful in what you've heard. It was Mr. Hylton's idea.

MISS TRIGGS. That dissenting person! I always *felt* he was an impostor. He tried to make me believe he was a clergyman I remember.

LADY DENISON. He meant it kindly. We all meant it kindly.

MRS. HORROCKS. Lady Denison, if you cannot understand how insulting this is to *me* I cannot make you do so. But I *should* have thought, considering my birth and connections, I might have claimed a somewhat different treatment. The carriage please for the six o'clock train.

(*Sweeps out* L.)

MISS TRIGGS. And will you please send some tea to my room. I shall not come down again before I leave.

(*Exit* L.)

GENERAL BONSOR. Boring!

(*Exit* L.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. This, Muriel, is what comes of beginning one's Charity at Home!

CURTAIN.

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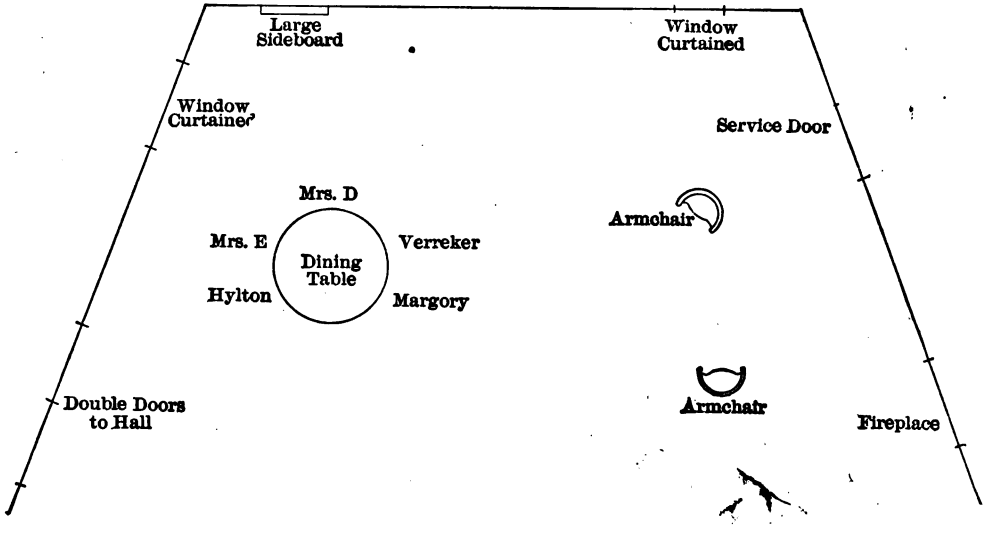
THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME
ACT IV.



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ACT IV.

SCENE.—*The Dining-room at Priors Ashton. A week has passed since Act III. There is a round dining-table about* C. *round which are sitting at dessert* LADY DENISON, VERREKER, MARGERY, HYLTON *and* MRS. EVERSLEIGH. LADY DENISON *faces the audience. The rest sit each on the other's right in the order given above. There is a side-board* L. C. *A door to kitchen regions up* R. *The double doors to hall are down* L. *There is a large window, curtained up* L. *and another* R. C. *The big fireplace is* R. *with armchairs on either side of it. The room is lighted by electric lights on the walls but there are also shaded candles in silver candlesticks on the table. Silver cigar box on mantelpiece. When curtain rises* WILLIAM *is handing fruit.*

WILLIAM. (*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH) Grapes, madam?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*taking some*) What fine grapes you have this year, Muriel!

(WILLIAM *hands to others.*)

MARGERY. Aren't they? I took some to old Biddy Porter to-day. She's been ill.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Who is old Biddy Porter?

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MARGERY. She lives at Ashton Parva, in one of those little houses before you get to the church. And she's had influenza so I thought it would be nice to take her some grapes. She was so pleased.

VERREKER. (*grimly*) The gardener wasn't.

MARGERY. No. Poor Thomson. He's so funny about the fruit. He seems to think we grow it entirely for ourselves. He's quite angry when I give any of it away. He doesn't even like my sending any to the cottage hospital.

LADY DENISON. You will be careful with Thomson, won't you, Margery. He's so easily offended. I remember last year when you took all the early peaches to the Workhouse infirmary just before we were giving some dinner parties he nearly gave warning. And I don't want to lose him. He's such an excellent gardener.

(WILLIAM *having finished his duties goes out* R.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. The new butler hasn't come yet?

LADY DENISON. No. We expect him to-morrow. I do hope he'll be a success. He has the highest references.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. That must be very distressing to Mr. Hylton.

MARGERY. Aunt Emily you're not to scratch Mr. Hylton. He's been working at proofs all day and now he wants a rest.

VERREKER. Lucky chap!

MARGERY. What do you mean?

VERREKER. To have *you* prescribing *rest* for him. You don't prescribe much rest for *me!*

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LADY DENISON. Has Margery been workng you very hard, Hugh?

MARGERY. Of course not mother. Hugh's only talking nonsense.

VERREKER. Am I! Just you listen. This morning I left some soup with Mrs. Green while Margery was taking Biddy Porter her grapes. She stopped the carriage at Mrs. Green's and dropped me there. It was nearly half an hour before she came back for me and I had to hear the history of every disease from which the old lady had ever suffered and to look at her bad leg.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Really, Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER. Arm, then. I know it was some part of her poor old body though I couldn't recognize it. It was quite disgusting. I should have gone away only Mrs. Green lives four miles from here and I hate walking when its hot. However the carriage came back at last and then we drove on to the church which Margery is decorating for some reason or other. I think because the harvest has failed. There I sat in a pew and made a wreath of mangel-wurzels to adorn the font.

MARGERY. Not mangel-wurzels.

VERREKER. Well, some kind of vegetable. We got back to lunch at last—late of course. The wreath took so long. And in the afternoon—after a brief interval of repose—I wrote letters on behalf of a certain Mary Gamage who wants to get into an orphanage at Basingstoke—which seems an odd taste. I wrote twenty-five of them.

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MARGERY. Only after you'd been coaxed for a whole quarter of an hour. You were quite cross about it and said you weren't a galley slave.

VERREKER. Well, I was wrong.

MARGERY. You were very disagreeable.

VERREKER. I know. I hoped we were going to quarrel. But you wouldn't. That's the worst of Margery. She never will quarrel.

HYLTON. It's a good fault.

VERREKER. Is it! However I wrote twenty-five letters on behalf of Mary Gamage as I said. And I've got seventy-five still to do. They were to ask subscribers to the orphanage for their votes. I gather some five hundred other people are busily engaged in writing the same number of letters on behalf of *their* orphans and the subscribers in common politeness will have to write to the whole five hundred of us to say they have given their votes to the 501st. They can only vote once. The mere expenditure in postage stamps would suffice to endow another orphanage, not to speak of the waste of my time and their's. Moreover I'm given to understand that this ritual is gone through every time the orphanage has a vacancy and that there are more than a hundred orphanages similarly conducted in this distracted country. Who ever heard of such tomfoolery!

MARGERY. It *is* troublesome of course. But I don't see how else you could settle whom to let in. There are so many orphans.

VERREKER. You could put the names in a hat, shake it and take the one that fell out first.

LADY DENISON. But would people subscribe to orphanages if they didn't get a vote?

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VERREKER. What on earth do they want votes for?

LADY DENISON. In order that *their* orphans may get in instead of the others.

VERREKER. Another illusion gone! I used to think charitable people gave their money because they were genuinely anxious to do good. I now find on the highest authority that they do it to keep out each other's orphans. Margery I won't write another letter.

MARGERY. Oh, Hugh, how horrid of you. If you don't *I* shall have to do them and you said you would.

VERREKER. Very well, I suppose I must as I said so. But my faith in charity is shattered. Nothing survives a closer acquaintance. Not even orphanages.

MARGERY. How absurd you are, Hugh. You know you only talk like that because you think it will shock us. And it doesn't shock us one bit. We only think it silly.

VERREKER. As you please, dear. But if that's the only way in which orphans can be kept alive I think you'd better drown them—and I've been an orphan myself.

LADY DENISON. Do you mind talking about something else for a moment Hugh? I think I hear William with the coffee and he mightn't like it.

(WILLIAM *enters* R. *and hands coffee.*)

HYLTON. (*to* MRS. EVERSLEIGH) Did you get as far as Croome this afternoon, Mrs. Eversleigh?

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Yes. Poor Lady Seathwaite is still in bed. But the doctor says she may be able to come down on Monday.

VERREKER. What's the matter with Lady Seathwaite?

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH *ignores him.*)

LADY DENISON. She has a bad attack of gout. She has it every autumn.

VERREKER. I see. Over-eats herself.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Mr. Verreker will you *kindly* remember that Lady Seathwaite is a friend of *mine?* And that I do not care to hear her insulted?

VERREKER. I'd no intention of insulting her, Mrs. Eversleigh. It was only a suggestion to account for her indisposition.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. A most uncalled-for suggestion.

VERREKER. Very well. I withdraw it. I daresay she eats too little and suffers from poverty of the blood. Margery shall drive me over to-morrow afternoon and we'll ask her which it is.

MARGERY. Hugh, Hugh, you're not to laugh at Aunt Emily. She doesn't like it. And we can't possibly go over to-morrow afternoon because you're coming with me to tea at the Vicarage.

VERREKER. Let's skip the tea.

MARGERY. Certainly not. The Willises would be dreadfully hurt if we didn't go. And its so unkind to disappoint people.

(*The electric light suddenly goes out, leaving only the candles on the table alight.*)

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Good Heavens! What's that?

LADY DENISON. (*calmly*) Only the electric light, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. *Only* the electric light!

LADY DENISON. It does happen sometimes. You see Basset, who looks after the dynamo, isn't really an electrician. He was a footman.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Then why does he look after the dynamo?

LADY DENISON. Well, he was out of a place—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH. Muriel!

LADY DENISON. What's the matter *now*, Emily? Nothing else has happened, has it? . . . . . He was out of a place as I said. He had been second footman at the Fox-Wilkinsons' at Abbots Ashton. But I'm afraid he sometimes took more to drink than was good for him. At last he was found one day after luncheon in the dining-room quite intoxicated. So they had to send him away. When Margery heard of it she wanted to have him here—under Soames. But Soames didn't seem to like the idea. He was quite indignant about it in fact. So as the electric light was being put in just then Margery said that Basset could be taught to look after the engine. But he's not very skilful as yet so the light sometimes goes out for hours at a time. I hope it isn't going to-night.

(*The light comes on again, goes out, comes on. Finally remains steady.*)

That's better. . . . . Now it's gone again. . . . That's right!

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MRS. EVERSLEIGH. (*acidly*) I thought you had given up engaging your servants on altruistic principles, Muriel?

LADY DENISON. So I have. But I couldn't send Basset *away,* could I? I don't think he could get another place. And besides he's really wonderfully improved. He hardly ever takes too much now. Shall we go? (*rises*)

(LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, *and* MARGERY *go out* L. FYLTON *holding open door.* VERREKER *strolls to fireplace and leans against mantelpiece. Stretches himself.* HYLTON *moves to* LADY DENISON'S *seat.*)

VERREKER. Lady Denison is the most absurd person in the world.

HYLTON. Is she?

VERREKER. Yes. But good people always are more or less absurd, aren't they?

HYLTON. (*smiling*) The children of this world *are* wiser than the children of light certainly.

VERREKER. Exactly. And she'll never learn wisdom now, poor lady. She's listened to *you* too long. She'll never get the poison out of her system.

HYLTON. She dimissed Soames.

VERREKER. But keeps Basset. You've won after all. Cigar? (*brings silver box from mantelpiece*)

HYLTON Thanks. (*they light up*)

VERREKER. Poor Mrs. Eversleigh! How she

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loathes me! She'll never forgive me for having proposed to Margery.

HYLTON. It doesn't matter. You've Lady Denison on your side.

VERREKER. Thanks to *you*.

HYLTON. I don't think *I'd* much to do with it.

VERREKER. I know better. If it hadn't been for you Lady Denison would be still unreconciled. I've no illusions on that point.

HYLTON. Miss Denison would have made your peace for you.

VERREKER. Yes. Margery has been a brick all through. She always would be. But *you* backed her up. I wonder why. (*pause*) Why was it?

HYLTON. (*hesitates*) Perhaps I felt I owed you some amends for the way I behaved when I first heard of your engagement.

VERREKER. I don't know. Your attitude was a perfectly reasonable one. It *was* a most ridiculous engagement for Margery. *Is* in fact.

HYLTON. Oh no.

VERREKER. Oh yes. I am a young man with a discreditable past and no future. Margery will have a good deal of money one day. Considered as a match for her its preposterous.

HYLTON. (*shrugs*) I wasn't thinking of money.

VERREKER. You never are, my dear fellow.

HYLTON. (*laughing*) Besides you won't be able to squander Miss Denison's money even if you want to. It'll all be tied up strictly in trust.

VERREKER. Yes—I shall be like a dog with a

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biscuit perpetually on his nose and nobody ever saying "paid for."

HYLTON. (*laughing*) Something like that.

VERREKER. However I didn't propose to Margery for her money, so I don't know that that matters.

HYLTON. Of course not. You proposed to her because you loved her. Because you couldn't help seeing how good and unselfish and noble she is.

VERREKER. (*raises his eyebrows.*)

HYLTON. (*enthusiastic*) No one could help loving Miss Denison. She has all sweet and loveable qualities. She is the most wonderfully good woman I've ever known.

VERREKER. Yes.—It's a great pity.

HYLTON. What do you mean?

VERREKER. People really ought to have some redeeming vices, don't you think? But Margery's quite impeccable, poor dear. I remember I spoke to her about it before I ever thought of proposing to her.

HYLTON. Scoffer!

VERREKER. Not at all. . . . . Margery's simply riddled with philanthrophy and unselfishness and the Devil knows what. *I* call it morbid. I don't believe she ever thinks of herself at all. I've never known anyone like her before. I don't believe there *is* anyone like her.

HYLTON. (*quite simply*) Miss Denison has a curiously perfect character.

VERREKER. That's what worries me.

HYLTON. Tck!

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VERREKER. It's all very well for you, Hylton. You've not got to live up to it. And if you had I daresay you wouldn't mind. You're a bit of a saint yourself. But for a healthy easy-going mortal like me it's rather alarming.

HYLTON. You'll get used to it.

VERREKER. You think so?

HYLTON. Yes—with Miss Denison's help. Why she's helped you already more than you realize. You're a different man from what you were a week ago.

VERREKER. I know. That's what's so annoying. Fancy *me* distributing soup to old ladies and soliciting votes for a blighted orphan! It's simply disgusting.

HYLTON. Nonsense, my dear fellow. You like it really, you know.

VERREKER. I beg your pardon! My whole soul —I think that's what you call it?—revolts against it. But I do it. That's the miracle.—And I *did* think the age of miracles was past!

HYLTON. (*enthusiastic*) The age of miracles will never pass while there are men and women like Miss Denison in the world!

(*Pause.*)

VERREKER. (*looking at him keenly*) You're a queer chap, Hylton.

HYLTON. Why?

VERREKER. Nothing. . . .

HYLTON. Yes. Faith can move mountains, now as always. And Miss Denison has faith, faith in goodness and in truth and in self-surrender. She'll convert you yet.

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VERREKER. (*firmly*) *No!*

HYLTON. She *will.* You laugh at Altruism now. In a year you'll be an altruist yourself. And it's your marriage that will have done it.

VERREKER. So *that's* why you approve of this absurd marriage.

HYLTON. Yes: It's to save a soul.

VERREKER. More philanthropy!

HYLTON. (*nods*) More philanthrophy. This marriage is going to be the making of you. It will help you to find yourself. Your true self.

VERREKER. (*sardonically*) I should have thought I'd managed *that.*

HYLTON. You're wrong. Your real self is not the healthy easy-going person you talk of. It's the strong, self-restrained, self-denying man, Miss Denison will put in his place. There's nothing the love of a really good woman can't do for a man. It brings out all that is fine in his nature and drives out all that is base. That is what your marriage will do for you!

VERREKER. The deuce it will!

HYLTON. (*collapsing from his enthusiasm under this cold douche*) But I must apologise for talking to you like this. I'm afraid it bores you.

VERREKER. Not a bit. I like it.

HYLTON. (*shaking his head*) No.

VERREKER. Yes, I do. In fact I'm rather interested in the Psychology of Benevolence just now. Please go on.

HYLTON. (*laughing*) Not to-night. Besides we ought to be moving. (*rises*)

VERREKER. Perhaps so. (*rises, pause*) Will

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Margery always be as *good* as she is now, do you suppose?

HYLTON. (*unhesitatingly*) I'll stake my life on it.

VERREKER. No chance of her outgrowing it?

HYLTON. None!

VERREKER. Ah! I hoped she might. . . . . Well, Hylton, I'm glad to have had this chat with you. You really are a good chap you know. And if you can go on being friends with a sweep like me I shall be grateful.

HYLTON. I think I shall manage that.

VERREKER. (*half to himself*) I'm not so sure.

(*Enter* MARGERY L.)

MARGERY. You *rude* people! You've stayed *much* too long over your cigars. How is poor William to clear away?

VERREKER. Can't he do that to-morrow morning?

MARGERY. That shows how much *you* know about managing a household!

HYLTON. We were just coming, Miss Denison.

MARGERY. You're too late now. Mother's gone to bed. She's tired. And Aunt Emily's going too. She's cross. And so am I. I'm offended.

VERREKER. Stay five minutes. Sit down here.

MARGERY. No!

VERREKER. Yes. (*puts her gently in his own chair. He sits on arm of armchair*) And give me a cigarette.

MARGERY. Ought you to smoke any more?

VERREKER. No. But I will. (*does so*)

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MARGERY. I've been getting some more letters done for Mary Gamage.

VERREKER. That infernal orphan!

MARGERY. Hush! So you won't have *quite* seventy-five more to write.

VERREKER. Thank heaven!

MARGERY. I think you might get up and do a few before breakfast to-morrow, just to show your gratitude? I'll help. I *should* like to get them all off before we go to the Vicarage.

VERREKER. Margery, I refuse!

MARGERY. Very well. But you're very foolish. Before breakfast is the nicest part of the day at this time of year. You lazy people who don't come down till half-past nine don't know what you're missing.

VERREKER. We'll take your word for it.

MARGERY. Will you come to tea at the Mackworths' on Friday, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON. Certainly if you like.

MARGERY. *You* must come too, Hugh.

VERREKER. All right. Who are the Mackworths?

MARGERY. They live in a funny little house in the village. Old Mrs. Mackworth's very deaf and *he* can't hear much either so they don't have many visitors. It's so tiring talking to deaf people, isn't it? One has to shout so. But I always try to go at least once when we're down here. It cheers them up I think. I'm glad you're both coming.

(VERREKER *groans. She rises.*)

And now I really must go to bed. Good-night.

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VERREKER. No. Stop a bit longer.

MARGERY. Can't.

VERREKER. Yes, you can. Just till I've finished this. Besides I've something rather particular to say to you.

HYLTON. (*rising*) In that case perhaps I'd better retire to the library.

VERREKER. Do. I'll be with you in two minutes.

(*Exit* HYLTON L. *Pause.*)

MARGERY. Well? What is this *important* thing you've got to say to me?

VERREKER. I'll tell you. (*pause. Looks at her fixedly for a moment or two*) By Jove, you *are* pretty, Margery.

MARGERY. I don't think *that's* very important.

VERREKER. Then you're very much mistaken! . . . However that's not what I had to say. (*pause*) Margery, I want you to break off our engagement.

MARGERY. Hugh!

VERREKER. My dear, I don't like saying it and I hope you don't like hearing it—though I don't want it to hurt you too much either. But I've been thinking things over and I'm quite sure we two oughtn't to marry.

MARGERY. Why not?

VERREKER. For lots of reasons. I'm not good enough for you, Margery, and that's the long and short of it.

MARGERY. What nonsense!

VERREKER. It's not nonsense at all unfortu-

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nately. It's a painful truth. Mrs. Eversleigh was right. I ought never to have proposed to you.

MARGERY. (*sadly*) Do you mean you don't love me, Hugh, as you thought you did?

VERREKER. No. I don't mean that. I love you as much as ever, more perhaps, now that I'm going to lose you. But on every ground except love I'm quite unfit to marry you.

MARGERY. Surely love is enough?

VERREKER. No, it isn't. Margery, let's face facts and not shirk them as everyone else seems to do. Marriage isn't a thing to be romantic about. It *lasts* too long.

MARGERY. Hugh!

VERREKER. My dear, it may last forty years. Surely that's long enough in all conscience. Very well then. As one marries for a long time one should choose carefully, reasonably. One mustn't be carried away by passion. Passion's a great thing in marriage but commonsense is a greater. Now what sort of a life should we make of it together if we married, you and I? Why, my dear, we've not an idea or a taste in common. Everything you say makes me laugh and almost everything I think would make you blush. It's simply absurd for a girl like you to marry a fellow like me. Let's say so franky and end it.

MARGERY. (*puzzled*) But, Hugh, you *liked* being engaged to me at first, didn't you? Why have you changed your mind? Have *I* done anything?

VERREKER. No, dear. You've been absolutely sweet and good, as you always would be. Only you're *too* good and that's all about it.

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MARGERY. Now you're laughing at me.

VERREKER. I never was further from laughter in my life. I say you're too good and I mean it. You look on life as a moral discipline. I look on it as a means to enjoyment. You think only of doing what you imagine to be right. I think only of getting what I know to be pleasant. They call it incompatibility of temper in the Law Courts, I believe.

MARGERY. I don't understand you, Hugh. Sometimes you seem quite serious and then you say something horrid that spoils it all.

VERREKER. I know, dear. You don't understand me and it's just as well you don't. But that makes the idea of marriage between us rather ridiculous, doesn't it? The sort of man you ought to marry is Hylton—who by the way is over head and ears in love with you. You should have heard his eulogies over you ten minutes ago. He was simply lyrical! Yes, you must marry Hylton. Will you?

MARGERY. (*half laughing, half crying*) I am still engaged to you, dear, so far.

VERREKER. I'll release you. And you really will be happy with Hylton. He's a first-rate chap. Promise me that when you've stopped mourning for me,—say in about a fortnight's time—you'll seriously consider the possibilities of Hylton.

MARGERY. Are you really heartless, Hugh, or do you only pretend to be?

VERREKER. I don't know. Ask Hylton.

MARGERY. (*sadly*) I thought we'd been so happy together since we've been engaged.

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VERREKER. (*heartily*) So we have, dear—in spite of Mary Gamage. But then we've only been engaged a week. And I feel *years* older for it.

MARGERY. (*hurt*) *Seriously,* Hugh?

VERREKER. I'm *serious* enough. You think everybody can be as self-denying as you are, Margery. You're wrong. Some people are born self-denying just as other people are born self-indulgent. I belong to the latter variety.

MARGERY. But you may change?

VERREKER. Men don't *change,* Margery. They *repent* but they don't *reform.* And so our engagement has been a mistake. It's my fault I know. I ought to have thought of all this before I asked you to marry me. But you were so pretty and—well I didn't. Will you forgive me?

MARGERY. Of course I forgive you, Hugh. It's not your fault. You thought you loved me and you asked me to marry you. Now you find you don't and you ask me to release you. You've been quite kind and straight-forward. There's nothing to forgive.

VERREKER. My dear, my dear, it's not that. I loved you before. I love you still. I believe I shall always love you—so long as I don't marry you. But married we should be miserable.

MARGERY. (*gently*) I don't think I should be miserable.

VERREKER. (*briskly*) I know *I* should. At first I should be as unselfish as the deuce just to oblige *you.* But after a bit I shouldn't be able to stand it and I should strike. And then you'd be disappointed and I should be disagreeable and

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our marriage would become a tragedy. I don't want that to happen. I'd rather you found me out now while you're still fond of me than later when you had come to hate me.

MARGERY. I should never *hate* you, Hugh.

VERREKER. You couldn't help yourself, my dear. An unhappy marriage would demoralize even you. They say some forms of suffering ennoble people, and putting up with what one doesn't like is supposed to be good for the character—though I'm sure I don't know why. But an unhappy marriage never ennobled man or woman. It makes them peevish and unreasonable. It sours their tempers and ruins their digestions. *My* parents didn't get on together, and I know. If the parsons cared two straws about morality instead of thinking only of their dogmas, they'd make divorcing one's wife as easy as dismissing one's cook. Easier.

MARGERY. Hugh!

VERREKER. They would! When married people don't hit it off they jar. There's no middle course. And when the jarring has gone on for a certain length of time it gets past bearing. Human nerves won't stand it. Nothing will enable them to stand it. Not love, nor religion, nor all the seven deadly virtues. Socrates was a good man but he made his wife pretty unhappy.

MARGERY. (*sadly*) And you think I should make you unhappy?

VERREKER. (*briskly*) I'm sure of it. So let's behave accordingly. (*rising*) Come Margery, say you release me and get it over.

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MARGERY. (*slowly*) Very well. If you really wish it . . . you're sure you *do* wish it?

VERREKER. Quite. Thanks, dear. You've behaved like a trump as you always do. And I think I must kiss you good-bye. (*does so tenderly*) Don't say anything to the others till after I've left. I rather dread Mrs. Eversleigh's unconcealed satisfaction. I shall go to-morrow.

MARGERY. Very well. If you'd rather not.

VERREKER. (*looking at her half ironically*) I'm afraid you think I've been a selfish beast about this?

MARGERY. (*wistfully*) A little selfish, perhaps.

VERREKER. You're wrong. For the first and I hope the last time in my life I've done an unselfish action. I'm a pauper, you know, and you're something of an heiress. And I've given you up without compensation. It's rather to my credit.

MARGERY. Only because you wouldn't be happy.

VERREKER. No. Because *you* wouldn't be happy. *I* should have been all right. But I had to put it the other way or you wouldn't have let me go. *I* should have given up philanthrophy after the first six weeks and had no end of a good time. But *you'd* have been wretched. We've done the right thing. (*rising*) And you won't forget about Hylton will you? Shall we go in? (*he goes* L. *and opens door for her. They go out as curtain falls*)

CURTAIN.

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